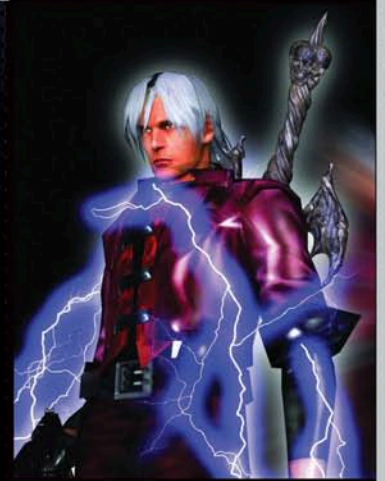


30th
GAMES
THAT
CHANGED
THE WORLD





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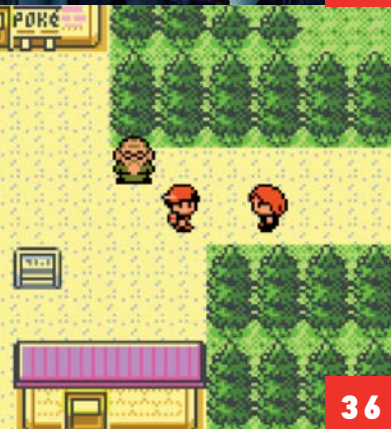
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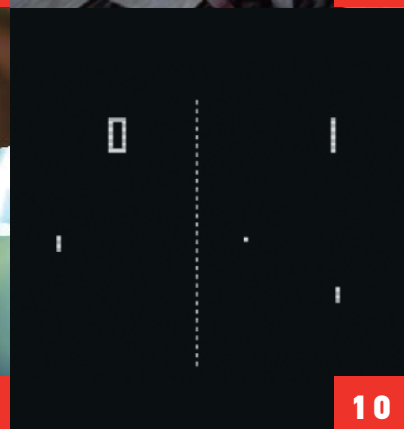
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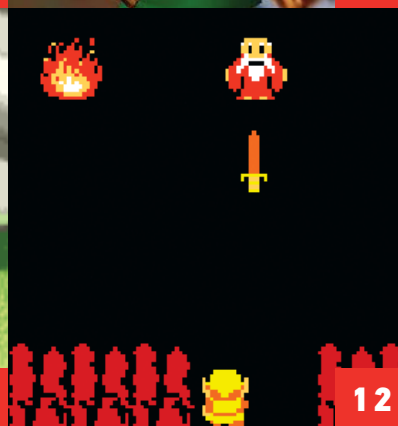
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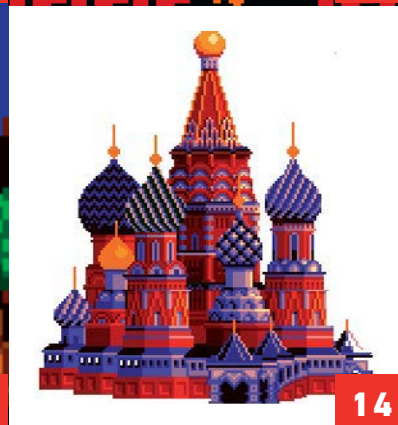
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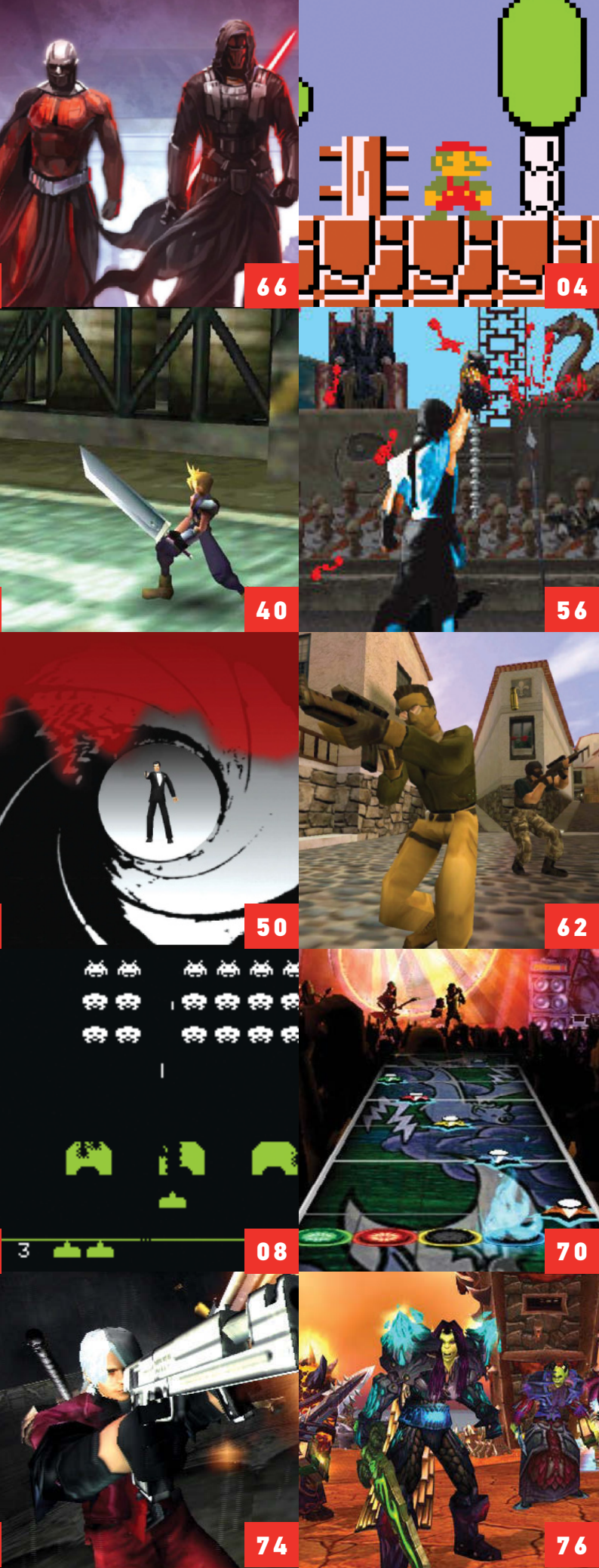
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GAMES

THAT

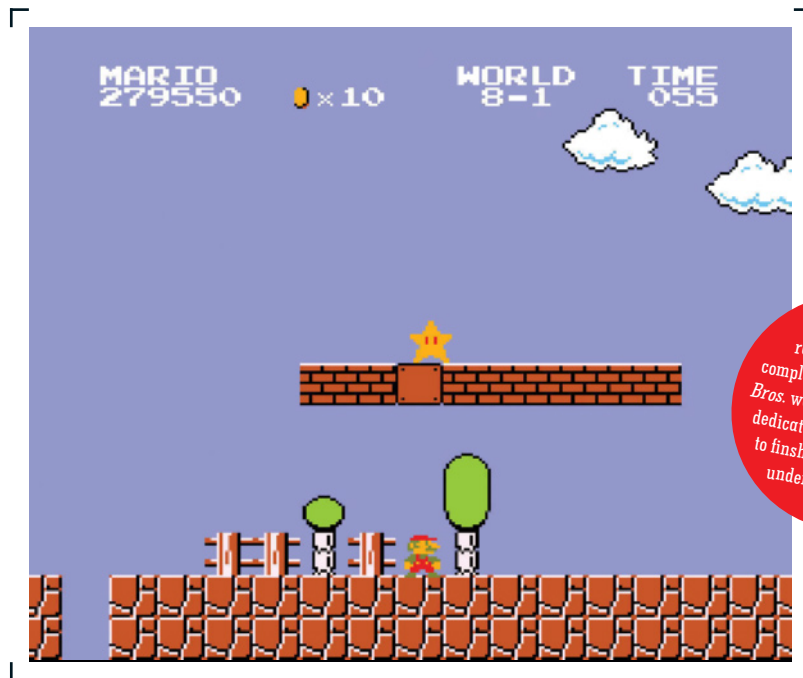
CHANGED THE WORLD

- 04** Super Mario Bros.
- 08** Space Invaders
- 10** Pong
- 12** The Legend Of Zelda
- 14** Tetris
- 18** Doom
- 20** Street Fighter II
- 22** Sonic the Hedgehog
- 26** Super Mario World
- 28** Myst
- 30** Super Mario 64
- 34** Elite
- 36** Pokémon Red/Blue
- 38** Metal Gear Solid
- 40** Final Fantasy VII
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- 46** Tomb Raider
- 48** SoulCalibur
- 50** GoldenEye 007
- 52** Gran Turismo
- 54** The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask
- 56** Mortal Kombat
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- 74** Devil May Cry
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GAME CHANGERS

SUPER MARIO BROS.

Released: 13 September, 1985 (JP) Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Nintendo R&D4 System: NES/Famicom



The world record time for the completion of *Super Mario Bros.* was recently beaten: a dedicated gamer managed to finish the game in just under five minutes!

The sequel to *Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros.* popularised the side-scrolling platformer and added multiplayer to what became Nintendo's flagship title

ORIGINATING AS A coin-operated game back in 1985, *Super Mario Bros.* eventually became synonymous with the NES – establishing itself as a killer app for the Eighties console. The platformer was a spiritual successor to *Mario Bros.* – a game that attracted a fair share of attention in its own right – but in adding the Super prefix (a trope that would come to define Nintendo sequels and spin-offs), the developer managed to create a game that would come to define the platform genre outright.

The game is not only a classic – generating a buzz on its Japanese and Western releases through, mostly, the rare gift of positive word of mouth – but it also stands up to the test of time. The game remains a relevant and valid example of platforming done well; *Super Mario Bros.* popularised the side-scrolling platformer, and the genre has since seen many contenders attempt to knock *Mario* off his pedestal atop the platforming throne. Few have come close, none have succeeded, and the superiority of *Super Mario Bros.* comes down to one aspect: its mechanics.

Oddly, in a world of moustachioed plumbers, lizard-dragons and Shy Guys, *Super Mario Bros.* is defined by its realistic mechanics. For an 8-bit game, the momentum and subtlety behind Mario and Luigi's movements was incredibly deft, operating on a system that you could understand from the first time you picked up the pad, yet would probably never master. The physics were analogous to real life; if you wanted to attempt a large jump, you'd have to get a running start. Conversely, if you started Mario off on a run (which was wonderfully animated with his stodgy little hands pumping up and down at his sides), you'd have to give him a margin of space to come to a stop in. Critics of the game called the mechanics slippery, but this didn't deter the fans – players who would stick with Mario and his bizarre world indefinitely – who fell in love with the peculiar momentum *Mario* popularised.

■■■ The bounciness of *Mario's* world also appealed to those first coming into gaming proper – jump on an enemy, and you'll have to fine-tune your landing.

DISSECT MARIO

SUPER MARIO BROS. IS PROUDLY PARADED BY A SLEW OF DEVELOPERS AS A HUGE INFLUENCE IN BOTH THEIR LIVES AND THEIR WORK



THE IMPENDING DEATH OF FAMICOM

★ Miyamoto was motivated to create a game that would be a respectable farewell to the NES cartridge system when Nintendo put forward the idea for a disk-based console to take its place. After talking about progressing Nintendo's 'athletic games' remit, the core idea for *Super Mario Bros.* was born.



MARIO BROS.

★ Unsurprisingly, Miyamoto's first foray into the Mario world was more of a proof of concept than anything else – it was *Super Mario Bros.* that took the franchise into the mainstream. Before, Mario had to flip turtles before stomping on them – this was deemed illogical in the revision, hence the bounciness of the platformer we have now.



ACCIDENTS

★ The shifting size of Mario was never actually intentional – in the prototype stages of development, *Super Mario Bros.* only had 'small' Mario, but when the development team altered the size of the levels and Mario stayed the same (becoming 'big'), Miyamoto decided to make Mario 'big' through power-ups.



MAGIC MUSHROOMS

★ Yep. Once the size-changing mechanic was agreed upon, Miyamoto took his influence from folk tales that were based on villagers wandering into forests, eating 'magical mushrooms' and changing sizes – hence why Mario's world became known as Mushroom Kingdom. Who would've guessed it?

It wasn't a matter of simply killing your enemies; that was only half of the battle. The game took full advantage of this, introducing an eclectic cast of villains that took full advantage of the seemingly limited scope that Mario had in his movements. Some would require tackling from above, some avoiding altogether, some only vulnerable at certain times. The power-ups – hidden in boxes that could be completely missed, if you weren't attentive enough – were sparse enough to keep the game challenging, but occurred often enough to always be *fun*, always *worth getting*. The game's level of challenge was perfectly attuned, suitable for all ages and never too easy or too hard for any party to take issue with: the bosses, too, each required dexterity and reflexes to overcome, pushing the simple A, B, and D-pad of the NES to its feasible limit without ever becoming pad-breakingly frustrating.

■■■ The enemies were complemented with level design that made the most of the tight physics, too. The need to constantly alter your vertical position after jumping was highlighted with staggered

SMB OPENED UP A WHOLE REALM OF POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERESTING AND DIVERSE MOVE-SET DESIGNS

KEY FACTS

■ *Super Mario Bros.* is the second best-selling game of all time, with a 40.24 million copies sold record – behind *Wii Sports'* ridiculous 82.45 million sales. (The fact the top two spots are held by Nintendo is telling.)

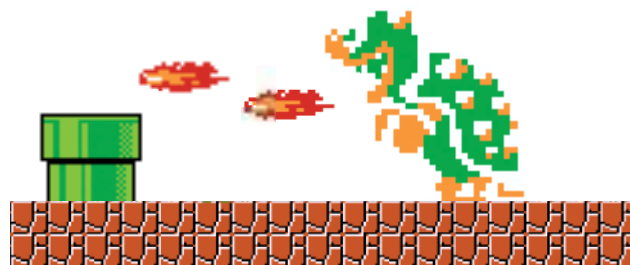
■ The score for *Super Mario Bros.* was originally a lot slower, but composer Koji Kondo upped the tempo of the six featured tracks when he saw players testing the game to match the quick pace of play

■ The original pitch for the game included a shoot-'em-up stage where Mario would fire bullets at enemies from cloud platforms

overground worlds that had high and wide platforms, forming paths into the clouds that felt wondrous and unique. The need to tune your position on-screen as you fell, and delicately press 'Jump' for differential heights, was played upon in the tighter, much more claustrophobic underground sections, too.

Both overground and underground sections were augmented by destructible environments that could throw a curve ball into the mix at any time, plopping you back on a lower level and interrupting your masterplan for completing the level in record time. On top of that, there was even a slew of secret levels tucked into various nooks and crannies of the various worlds, wresting you out of your comfort zone and throwing you into a bonus round of whacked-out weirdness. It was all part of the formula that would come to define *Mario* and his erstwhile franchise, and it was all operating at 100 per cent efficiency from the start.

Everything you'll play in a platforming game of any type nowadays inevitably owes a nod to *Super Mario Bros.*, and it's awe-inspiring to think about just how solidly Nintendo's seminal side-scroller established the genre.



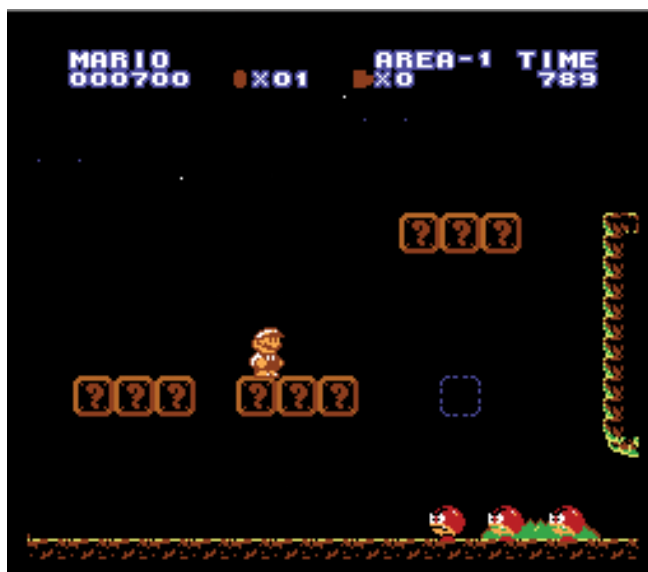
GAME CHANGERS THE 8 BEST SUPER MARIO BROS. HACKS

THE GREAT THING ABOUT GAMES AS SIMPLY CONSTRUCTED AS SUPER MARIO BROS. IS THAT THEY ARE EASIER TO REVERSE ENGINEER THAN THEIR MODERN-DAY COUNTERPARTS. THIS LEADS TO SOME GREAT CUSTOM GAMES SEEPING INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN – SUPER MARIO BROS. IS FAMOUS FOR HAVING A VAST ARRAY OF HACKED VERSIONS, SO WE COMPILED OUR FAVOURITES FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE



SUPER MARIO FRUSTRATION

■ A MINEFIELD OF invisible blocks and obstacles impede your progress through every single level of this fiendish re-creation of *Super Mario Bros.* We played a few levels of it, and will happily say it's harder than *Dark Souls*. If you don't believe us, take the challenge yourself – you'll soon understand why we said it.



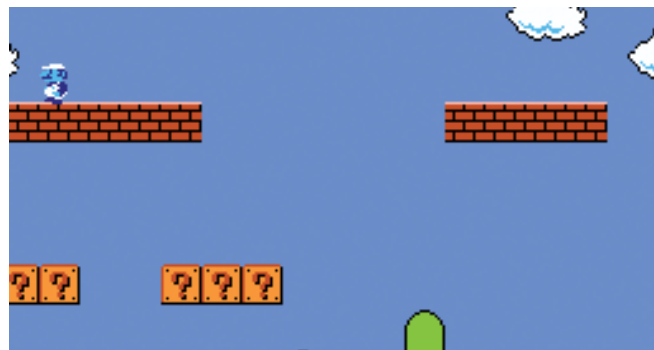
EXTRA MARIO BROS

■ A HACK THAT adds new maps, new graphics, new enemies and new power-ups to the game, *Extra Mario Bros.* sometimes doesn't hit the *Mario* template one-for-one, but it's worth playing through just to get to the final boss battle. It's quite a stretch from what you'll be used to seeing in *Mario* games, but it's worth a play.



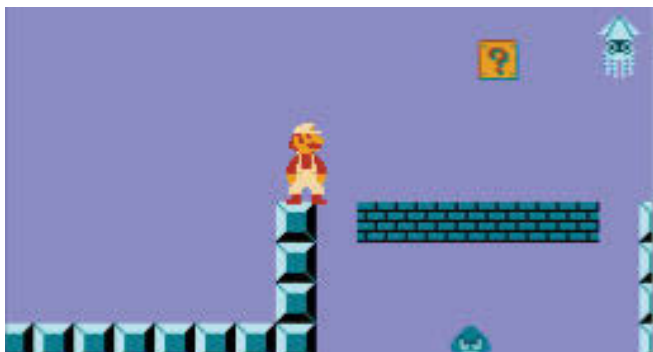
SUPER MUSHROOM

■ REPLACING MARIO WITH Toad, *Super Mushroom* sees power-ups replaced with enemies, new sound effects added for jumping and some reworked graphics and textures. The game is apparently at a '99.9%' difficulty level and is considered one of the hardest *SMB* hacks made.



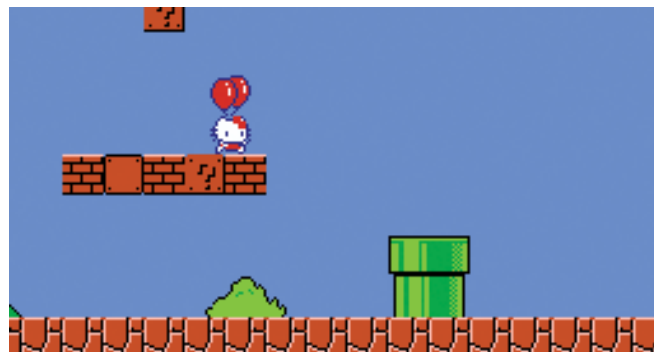
SUPREME ICE BROS.

■ A HACK THAT sees the fire power-up of Mario's replaced with an ice-based attack, *Supreme Ice Bros.* also replaces Goombas with ninjas (who receive a speed boost), sees Bowser become the devil, hidden paths in pre-existing levels and completely remade music. It's stupidly hard, too.



THE NEW STRANGE MARIO BROS.

■ INTENTIONALLY GLITCHY AND oddly designed levels are the trademark of *The New Strange Mario Bros.*, a game that gets harder as it goes on. Infamous for incorporating new graphics that messed around with how the physics of the games worked, *The New Strange Mario Bros.* really was the experience it promised



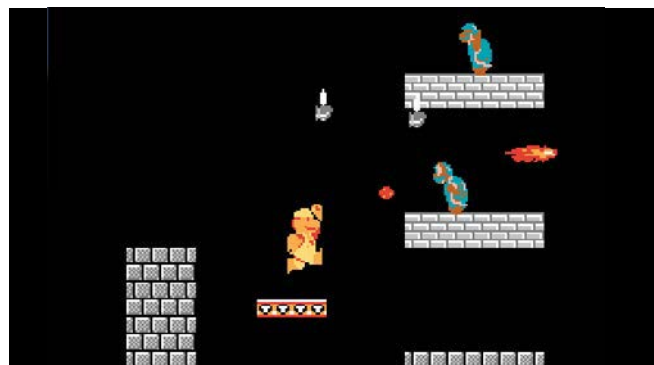
HELLO KITTY IN THE MUSHROOM KINGDOM

■ THIS BIZARRE HACK takes the sprites from the Japanese NES game *Hello Kitty World* and uses them to replace the eponymous *Bros.* of the original title. Even coming with its own story, the hack is the result of a lot of effort, and actually a surprisingly good game.



LUIGI'S FIRST QUEST: THE SEARCH FOR MARIO

■ ROLES HAVE BEEN reversed, and it's Luigi's time to shine in this hack that places the lankier, greener brother in the shoes of his stodgy younger brother. The hack includes a slew of new levels that take advantage of Luigi's higher jumping prowess.



JOE & MOE PIZZA DELIVERY

■ PROBABLY RIFFING ON the inherent stereotype-bashing inherent to Mario, *Joe & Moe* replaces the majority of the graphics in *Super Mario Bros.* and replaces them with the creator's own take on the Mushroom Kingdom. The levels have been redesigned, too, but not to a particularly high standard.



GAME CHANGERS


SPACE INVADERS

Released: 1978 Publisher: Taito Developer: In-house System: Arcade



The *Space Invaders* IP is technically owned by Square Enix today, since the Japanese corporation purchased a majority share in Taito in 2005.

It conquered the arcades in the Seventies and Eighties and invented a genre, but *Space Invaders* also became an axiom for creative engineering

 THERE'S AN EXPRESSION often overused throughout videogame critique pointing towards an elusive 'Citizen Kane moment'; a phrase that, despite its opaque and unashamedly extraneous nature, insinuates rather prophetically that – in a similar fashion to Orson Welles' seminal motion picture – one videogame will define its medium as a serious platform for both technical excellence and creative expressionism. Now, we're not here to debate whether such a thing exists or not, but there's clearly a flagrant injustice highlighted by the very idea that the industry is *still* to this day anticipating such a moment to arrive when it has arguably already passed. *Space Invaders*, a title that debuted 35 years ago in Japan, was a bold, innovative and immensely influential title that not only laid the groundwork for some of the most important industry developments to date, but to this day remains one of the purest, most enriching pieces of software ever created. It did then, as it still does now, perfectly encapsulate the iconic nature symbolised by that aforementioned hoary phrase.

When *Space Invaders* arrived in arcades back in the late Seventies, it's fair to say that no one had ever seen anything quite like it before. Arcades were teeming with cabinets that displayed a variety of experiences rooted in reality: sport simulators, racing games and the occasional Western showdown, each either tangible or derivative in some way or another. Initially creator Tomohiro Nishikado envisioned players fending off waves of tanks, warplanes and soldiers, but soon a more fantastical approach replaced the war theme – due in part to the questionable taste of exterminating waves of people, not to mention the sudden popularity in 1977 of space movies like *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* in the US. The idea of an alien onslaught captured the imagination of the public like nothing else, maybe because it explored a generation's pervasive paranoia, fear of invasion from a superior militant force and fascination with the stars, or maybe it was just because it was, unlike the majority of coin-ops of the time, original. Beyond its rudimentary presentation, it was thematic in its

HOW IT INVADED PLANET EARTH

THE REASONS WHY SPACE INVADERS BECAME A PHENOMENON



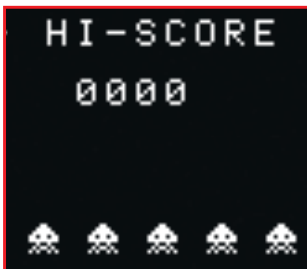
INNOVATION

★ There was nothing like *Space Invaders* at the time of its release. It presented several fresh gameplay ideas, a sense of the fantastical and even packed in a narrative in some form. Up until that point, most gamers were used to playing racing or sports games.



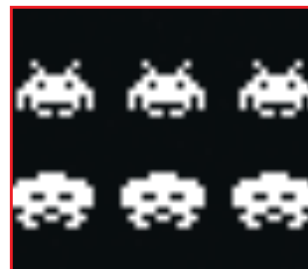
CONTROVERSY

★ One accolade that mostly goes ignored by *Space Invaders* is the amount of controversy it courted after its release in the US. Newspapers ran stories about penny-pinching children, zombified youth and health issues all caused by the game. It all sounds awfully familiar...



HIGH SCORE

★ People lined up for hours for a chance to play *Space Invaders*, which is in some part due to the implementation of a scoreboard. Everyone wanted to get their name etched on the high score leaderboard. An event held by Atari in New York attracted 4,000 people in 1981.



BRANDING

★ There was something about the detailed characters that helped launch *Space Invaders* to global dominance. The extra-terrestrials and classic spaceship design spawned waves of merchandise that proved a hit in the Seventies and Eighties and chic enough for retro enthusiasts decades later.

structure with an inherent tension borne by its keen design choices. It wasn't the first game to be set in the outer reaches of the universe, but it was one of the first to understand the excitement that can be drawn from looking beyond the realm of plausibility and how the medium can utilise story effectively without compromising urgency.

■■■ MUCH OF ITS success is down to the gameplay design as it is the choice of theme, or rather how they both naturally complement one another. *Spacewar!* may predate it, but *Space Invaders* ultimately birthed the shoot-'em-up genre as we know it. Enemies falling down the screen, the player having to repel their attack with weapons, clearing the screen to progress to the next stage. It's a template that would be adapted by other arcade classics like *Galaxian*, *Phoenix*, *1942*, *Xevious* and *Galaga*, to name a few, and latterly inspire more modern examples like *Blazing Lazers*, *Raiden*, *Radiant Silvergun*, and *Ikaruga*. Oh, and then it was more-or-less adapted into the horizontal-scrolling space shooters like *Gradius* and *R-Type*. And if that's not enough, indulge us for a moment as we rattle off a few of the notable features Taito's title pioneered: it was the first arcade game where the in-game targets

**SPACE INVADERS
ULTIMATELY
BIRTHED THE SHOOT-
'EM-UP GENRE AS WE
KNOW IT**

KEY FACTS

■ It's rumoured that the arcade version of the game was responsible for Japan's coin shortage during its time of release.

■ The Atari 2600 port of *Space Raiders* was the first home licence of a coin-op game.

■ Being a good port, it was one of the Atari 2600's killer app releases and helped shift millions of consoles following the game's home release in 1980.

■ *Space Invaders* introduced international markets to Japanese videogames. Previously Midway, Atari and Exidy ruled the videogaming roost.

return fire at the player, it introduced the idea of assigning a number of lives to the player and it also popularised the concept of achieving a high score – not only that, but it was the first game that actually recorded scores to its internal memory.

It's impossible to over-emphasise how important the latter point was in both *Space Invaders'* success and its ensuing legacy. That notion of competition spurred a generation to gather around the hum of the CRT screen and compete for a place on a scoreboard, to pour coin after coin into the mechanism for another opportunity to prove their resolve and their prowess; it was a way for players to create a legacy.

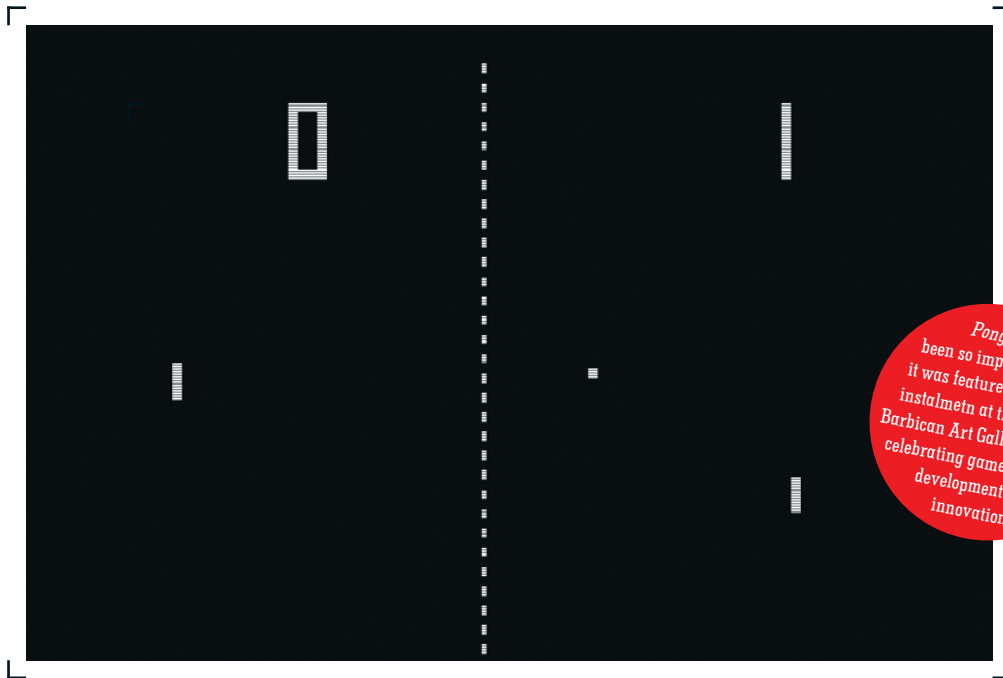
The sense of community for anyone old enough to remember was infectious, rallying together around a cabinet that offered an unlimited challenge. The difficulty increase, the open-ended nature of the gameplay and the constant beckoning of the scoreboard drove players – in fact, the world – into a frenzy.

Alas, the arcade may slowly be dying – its darkened halls replaced over the years by living rooms and later fibre-optic broadband – but the ideas *Space Invaders* presented still burn bright. It didn't take long for it to invade home consoles (turning the fortunes around on the Atari 2600) and that's where it continues to stay. And while the original has been adapted, remade and reinvented multiple times over the years to varying degrees of success, its impact is embedded in today's most lucrative franchises, celebrated indie darlings and experimental curios, so sprawling and multifarious to even attempt listing, that continue to pass on its legacy. A *Citizen Kane* moment may be a fallacy, but a *Space Invaders* one we can all believe in.

GAME CHANGERS

PONG

Released: 1972 Publisher: Atari Developer: Atari System: Arcade



Pong has been so impactful that it was featured in an art instalment at the London Barbican Art Gallery in 2002, celebrating games culture, development and innovation

How the table-tennis arcade game that originated in bars and takeaway buildings gave birth to the entire industry we know and love today

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ WE ALL KNOW *Pong*. The two paddles scrolling up and down the side of the screen, the blip of a ball pinging back and forth between the two players' pads – it's an industry phenomenon, the birth of interactive entertainment, signified with two rectangles, a square and a dotted line. The old adage of 'less is more' certainly works in *Pong*'s favour: it's arguably the most simplistic game out there, yet perhaps the most impactful.

The story of *Pong* is a relatively simple one; it was actually preceded by another coin-operated cabinet called *Computer Space*, a game that tasked players with taking on the role of a pixelated space ship and taking out enemy alien craft. It was difficult for a coin-op, not player-friendly enough to extract enough credits and keep players coming back for more (though it did make over \$3 million in cabinet sales), so Atari founders Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney along with programmer Al Alcorn thought up *Pong*, a game that was simple to pick up, competitive, and – most importantly – addictive.

Before *Pong* cabinets captured the imaginations of the mainstream, computer games were the domain of bored computer programmers, of military engineers

that had time to spare and access to an incredibly rare resource at the time: a computer. After the release of the Magnavox Odyssey – complete with its own primitive tennis game – Bushnell and his fellow employees at Atari saw the lines these games were drawing in at stores that had the console on-site, and realised that if games like these were made publicly available, on a kind of pay-per-play basis, it would easily draw a profit.

■ ■ ■ ■ *Pong* was born, and the game caught on. You could argue it was the birth of social gaming – a collaborative yet competitive effort between two friends, working together, to try and get the highest score possible while attempting to stretch your money out for as long as possible. *Pong* invented arcade gaming as we know it today – it established that there was a market of young people with disposable income that would happily pay money to play games in a social environment. Consoles were still ludicrously expensive – owned by those with a lot of wealth to spare, or those that were lucky enough to get a hold of one of the limited machines manufactured in the first place. *Pong* tapped into the

INDUSTRIAL IMPACT | PONG SPAWNED A RANGE OF OTHER STUDIOS THAT WOULD GO ON TO BECOME SOME OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPERS

namco

NAMCO

★ In the beginning, Atari originally had an in-house team working overseas in Japan to localise its games and to build the cabinets that would be shipped around the country. After a certain amount of time, this splinter division of Atari was eventually sold to Namco, and the rest, as they say, is history.

KONAMI

KONAMI

★ Originating as a jukebox rental and repair company in 1969, long-time Konami chairman Kagemasa Kozuki saw the unprecedented success *Pong* was having in domestic and foreign arcades and, over time, transformed Konami into one of the premier arcade machine specialists in the world.

Nintendo®

NINTENDO

★ Nintendo, historically a playing card company, had started testing out other markets in 1956, to great success. Ultimately, by 1974, it branched out into videogames, shamelessly cloning *Pong* in one of its first efforts to break into the industry. And as we know, they all lived happily ever after.

ATARI

ATARI SHOCK

★ As of 1983, the industry suffered from a huge shrinkage due to a recession from \$3.2 billion right down to \$100 million (a startling 97% drop). This was largely attributed to Atari's meteoric rise, and the industry's inability to keep up with demand in the years after *Pong* broke the mainstream.

common market, the everyday player. It tapped into what the industry would eventually come to call the 'casual gamer'.

Pong was a revelation, shipping 3,500 units in a matter of months, at a time when traditional coin-operated games were only selling under 1,500 units per release. The press of the time became enamoured with the idea of a playable TV program, and there was a jostling among newspapers and magazines to define this new phenomenon: Space Age games, Space Age pinball, TV tennis, TV games, television skill games and video skill games were some of the format labels offered, before popular consensus settled on the videogames moniker that we know and love today.

Pong came to not only be one of the most iconic images of the videogames industry, but also of the Seventies in general – seeping its way into cross-media, with references made to the *Pong* machine in sitcoms, films and literature from the time. *Pong* also launched Atari to international acclaim, drawing attention to the company that would become synonymous with gaming.

THERE WAS A JOSTLING AMONG NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES TO DEFINE THIS NEW PHENOMENON

KEY FACTS

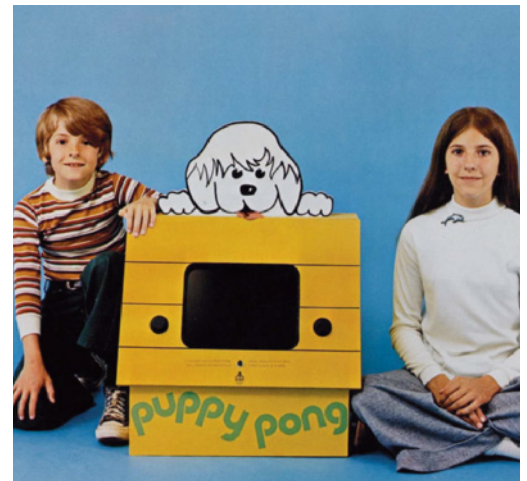
■ In the very first iteration of the coin-operated *Pong*, there was a glitch that didn't let players defend the entire side of their field, which turned out to be incredibly frustrating for everyone involved.

■ The most recent valuation of *Pong* put the game's overall value at a whopping \$78.5 billion, respective of inflation; that makes *Pong* the biggest arcade title to date.

■ Bushnell set up Atari during *Pong*'s development, taking the company's name from the Japanese word for 'check' in the boardgame he was obsessed with, known as *Go*.

The simplicity and accessibility of *Pong* slingshotted the idea of interactive entertainment to the masses, breaking out of the humid labs of computer professionals and engineers into the thriving American bars of the Seventies. Due to *Pong*'s relative simplicity to code and create, many junior programmers used the game as a basis to get to grips with creating games, and almost every single format of console has since seen some iteration of *Pong* make an appearance – usually as a test for up-and-coming designers to get to grips with the console's programming language.

It's a success story unique in its inception and impact, a technical and cultural revolution all in one. Without *Pong*, we wouldn't have the industry as we know it today. *Pong* didn't just change the videogames industry, it changed the world.



GAME CHANGERS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Released: 21 February 1986 Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-house (Nintendo R&D4) System: Famicom Disk System / NES



Everyone knows *Zelda* – aside from being Nintendo's seminal RPG franchise, the series has become a symbol of gaming itself. The heroic Link is paraded around as much as Mario or Sonic. But where did it all begin and what did the first game do so right that made it stick in everyone's mind so fervently?

WITHOUT *THE LEGEND OF ZELDA*, the RPG as we know and love it today wouldn't exist. But that isn't to say that it was a true RPG in and of itself – think about the core mechanics: there are no experience points, no interchangeable characters, no 'jobs'. The original *Zelda* was, instead, a foundation, a basis for home console games in an age where the arcade ruled. *The Legend Of Zelda* was developed concurrently with *Super Mario Bros.*, both by visionary and auteur Shigeru Miyamoto, and as such he wanted the two titles to head in very different directions.

Super Mario Bros. was designed to be linear, to offer players the challenge of one obstacle at a time to overcome – a trial and error game that presented a single finite challenge at a time: a score attacker's paradise. *Zelda* was built to occupy the opposite space to that; it wasn't about high scores and action in sequence, it was constructed to make the player *think* about where to go next – combining textual cues with

map design and environmental storytelling to help the player come to their own conclusion.

■■■ Miyamoto knew there would be no point in just sending players down into labyrinthine dungeons to find the right path amid a jumble of dead ends – he knew that, by opting for the top-down view, he had to give the players something else, something more aesthetically pleasing to carry them through this new land of Hyrule. Rumour has it that Miyamoto originally came up with the idea for *The Legend Of Zelda* as he was daydreaming, opening random desks at his drawer and imagining a unique garden within each of them – that fantasy began to build the rich Hyrulean environment, mixed with memories of his native Sonobe – fields, woods, natural caves, lakes and hills.

In building a fantasy home away from home, Miyamoto gave his game its most notable quality – creating a world that provoked wanderlust; the need

THE ANATOMY OF THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA SHAPED THE GAMING INDUSTRY AS WE KNOW IT – BUT WHAT WERE THE CORE COMPONENTS OF THE GAME ITSELF?



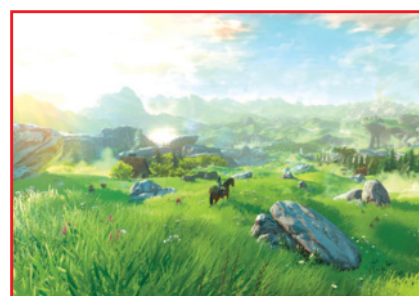
CELTIC LORE

★ Link himself is a Japanese interpretation of traditional Celtic lore – a young, beautiful hero working with nature to defeat a greater evil (think Cu Chulainn). Epona, also, is a Celtic Horse God. It may go some way to explaining how this series has always resonated in the West so well.



JAPANESE HISTORY

★ Aside from a few obvious allusions to Shintoism, the Triforce itself represents the three traditional traits a Japanese Royal Dynasty was supposed to embody. Its continued appearance in other videogames is more likely a nod back to *The Legend Of Zelda* though than to Shintoism.



KYOTO

★ The abundance of nature in Miyamoto's home district is the reason we see so much colour and wilderness in *Zelda* – a staple that hasn't changed through the series as you continue to explore lush fields and forests in Hyrule and beyond. *Windwaker* was a rare departure from this.

to explore. Miyamoto intentionally made some parts of the game cryptic and difficult, to promote the idea of players communicating about what they found – about how *their* story played out. Consequently, there needed to be a satisfying payoff for going out of your way to discover something, whether it was just an item or a weapon. That payoff came with its own distinctive jingle – the 'secret found' sound byte – which has become synonymous with gaming not just for us gamers, but the mainstream, too.

This innate human quality was paired with something equally as human in Link – a young protagonist that was designed around the ideas of courage, strength and wisdom, something Miyamoto intended to encapsulate young players coming of age. You begin the story innocent and young, yet soon you're armed, motivated, ready to take on the ultimate evil – you, this ordinary person, are going to rescue royalty; the eponymous *Zelda*.

Yet that wasn't the end of the story – just because you rescued the princess, it didn't mean the game was over. In fact, it was really just beginning. This

MIYAMOTO GAVE HIS GAME ITS MOST NOTABLE QUALITY – CREATING A WORLD THAT PROVOKED WANDERLUST

KEY FACTS

■ The original version of the game was squeezed onto the Famicom Disk System's 112KB capacity disks

■ Nintendo bosses were originally very nervous about *The Legend Of Zelda's* release, believing players would find the new open world concept 'boring and stressful'

■ Princess *Zelda's* name originally came from Miyamoto's admiration of novelist *Zelda Fitzgerald*, married to F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose name he thought had 'a magical sound' to it

revelation gave you an idea of how big this game was going to be; there was no 'your princess is in another castle' nonsense here. Miyamoto, again, wanted to do something different.

■■■ Aside from the innovative weaving of story and mechanics – gathering inventory and parts of the Triforce in each level (or dungeon) – the game was also the first instance of battery-based backup saving: when the title shipped to the States, on a cartridge for the NES, its internal battery allowed players to save their game and resume when they next started the system up. It seems basic now but, at the time, this was revolutionary.

Zelda's impact extends beyond that, though – it begins to shape the very foundations of the genre as we understand them today. Before the game's release, most RPGs were text-based, stat-heavy, riffing unapologetically off tabletop RPGs and high fantasy tropes established in early literature. *Zelda* came along and simplified all that – taking the best parts of fantasy world building and applying it to a simpler two-button setup.

From one man's innocuous daydreaming at his work desk, to a 25-year legacy and countless minds influenced by his concepts, *Zelda* has become as deeply ingrained in our collective cultural subconscious as *Beowulf*, Shakespeare, *Star Wars*, and *The Simpsons*. It's an essential part of worldwide culture, a game that defies that recently drawn-up line between casual and hardcore gamers. It's a beautiful anomaly – a game easily years ahead of its time. *Zelda* – its impact and its legacy – is more than just a game: it's a legend in and of itself.



GAME CHANGERS

TETRIS

Released: 1984 Publisher: Various Developer: Various System: Various



games™ investigates Tetris, Alexey Pajitnov's addictive puzzler that remains a delightfully frustrating experience nearly three decades later and has helped to establish the language of puzzle games for decades to follow. What has made it so appealing for so long?



IT'S OFTEN SAID that the greatest games have simple mechanics at their core. This is particularly true of Alexey Pajitnov's *Tetris*, which has gone on to become one of the most recognisable games of all time, and, for many, is solely responsible for popularising the puzzle genre.

Tetris was created in Russia by Pajitnov and Dmitry Pavlovsky on the Elektronika 60, a Soviet Union terminal computer, while they were working at the Soviet Academy Of Sciences. Their friend, Vadim Gerasimov, who also helped with the game, was responsible for porting *Tetris* to the IBM PC. The trio had planned to create a number of different puzzle

games that they would then sell (a difficult proposition in Russia at the time). One of the ideas that Pajitnov was working on for the compilation was a game called Genetic Engineering, which consisted of moving tetraminos around a screen to assemble various shapes. It wasn't fun to play, but several months later Pajitnov came up with the concept that would shape one of the most successful franchises of all time.

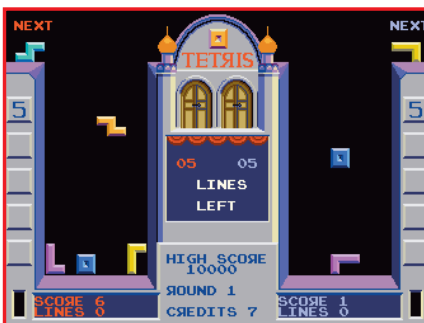
His new game involved the player having to assemble different shaped tetraminos as they fell into a rectangular well. The player could manipulate the falling shapes through 90 degrees with the goal being to create an unbroken horizontal line of ten blocks. If

★ **MAGIC MOMENTS** | THERE ARE MANY INCREDIBLE MOMENTS TO BE HAD WHILE PLAYING TETRIS – HERE ARE OUR TOP THREE



YOUR FIRST TETRIS

★ **THERE'S SOMETHING** magical about getting your very first Tetris. Waiting for that final four-piece block to fall into place is almost as nerve-racking as waiting for it to show up. You'll breathe a massive sigh of relief when it finally drops.



MULTIPLAYER

★ **INITIALLY YOU** were just playing against your best score, but it wasn't long before you were able to challenge other players. Beating the computer is fine, but there's something far more gratifying about owning a human opponent.



THE MUSIC

★ **YOU HAD** to wait three years for the Game Boy version to come along, but when it finally arrived it came packaged with some amazingly catchy music that perfectly captured the frantic pace of the actual game.

this is achieved the blocks disappear and score the player points. Once a set number of lines have been cleared the level is completed and the game gets ever so slightly faster. Play continues like this until the falling tetraminos eventually reach the top of the well. Despite the addictive nature of Pajitnov's new game, now called *Tetris*, Pajitnov had trouble selling the compilation it featured on. *Tetris*, along with the other games by Pajitnov and his friends, were given out for free to friends and family and eventually found their way onto PCs outside of Soviet Russia.

■■■ **PAJITNOV** WAS approached by Spectrum Holobyte to publish the game in the West, which he agreed to. The other games weren't part of the deal, however, which infuriated Pavlovsky and Gerasimov, who parted ways with Pajitnov. It was the first sign of trouble for the *Tetris* creator, but it wouldn't be the last, and the sheer popularity of the game resulted in numerous legal battles in the intervening years, with a number of publishers all claiming the rights to sell various versions of the massively popular game. It wouldn't be until 1996, after Pajitnov formed The Tetris Company with Henk Rogers (who discovered the game at CES in 1988 and secured its release for the NES and Game Boy) that he began to receive royalties for his popular puzzle game.

MANY DEVELOPERS HAVE ATTEMPTED TO BETTER IT, BUT FEW HAVE SUCCEEDED

KEY FACTS

■ *Tetris* has easily adapted to each new piece of hardware. It's been ported to many machines, from consoles and computers to phones and tablets.

■ *Tetris* is one of the most, if not the most cloned game of all time. Theodor Lauppert lists over 180 clones on his site. Visit <http://theodor.lauppert.ws/games/tetriscl.htm> for more information.

■ *Tetris* has sold millions since its release in 1984, but it's had the most success on mobile phones. While it has sold over 70 million units on home consoles, it has sold over 100 million on mobiles.

And by then *Tetris* had proven to be massively popular, particularly the Game Boy version, which has now become synonymous with Nintendo's handheld. While the NES version had shifted an impressive 8 million units, the Game Boy version dwarfed this by selling over 33 million. Admittedly, it was packaged with the device itself, but it allowed a huge number of people to experience the game.

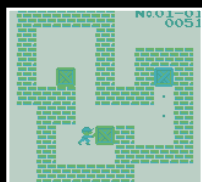
It's the simplicity of *Tetris* that makes it so much fun to play, and while many developers (including Pajitnov) have attempted to better it, few have succeeded. *Tetris* married simplicity to tight controls and simple puzzle solving to create an amazing experience, which only deepened as later games began to offer more interesting gameplay mechanics.

For many it's the original game that remains the best, and this is mainly due to its sheer accessibility. The beauty of *Tetris* was that, while it was extremely easy to pick up, it wasn't easy to conquer, with the continuing speed increase of the game requiring godlike reflexes on its later levels. Then there was the clever scoring system it offered, delivering more points to the player if they could complete a wall that was four blocks high (known as a Tetris). The random nature of each new block meant that it was impossible to predict when the four-block rectangle would show up, meaning *Tetris* offered a suitable risk and reward factor for those that attempted to wait around for the errant block to turn up.

29 years after its original release and with millions of units sold and nearly 50 officially released sequels, *Tetris* shows no signs of slowing down. Its timeless gameplay and simple yet stylised visuals define everything we love about videogames and help keep it fresh for every new generation of gamer that discovers it. A true classic.

> BEFORE TETRIS

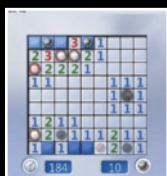
Other puzzle games we were playing before Tetris changed everything



SOKOBAN 1981

■ *Sokoban* was an early puzzle game where you

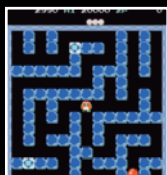
had to push a set number of boxes to specific points within a warehouse. Poor planning meant it was easy to trap yourself if you didn't pay attention. It would appear on numerous systems, from NEC PC-8801 to Game Boy.



MINESWEEPER UNKNOWN

■ Most PC owners will be aware of this puzzle game as it comes with

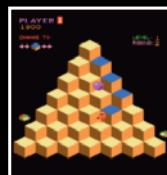
most operating systems. After being presented with a blank grid you must work out where mines are hidden using only numbers for clues. A surprisingly tense game that's still a great time-waster.



PENGO 1982

■ Excellent block-pushing game from Sega where you control a cute penguin. Kill

enemies as quickly as possible by shunting blocks onto them and crushing them. Simply to play, but very tough to actually master.



Q*BERT 1982

■ Fantastic arcade game where you play as the titular Q*birt and must bounce

around an isometric level until you've turned all the blocks on screen to the same colour. Easy, apart from all the annoying monsters chasing after you...

> TETRIS SEQUELS

Far from a one-off, here are the various follow-ups that have taken the Tetris formula and played with it



WELLTRIS 1989

■ Imagine a 3D version of *Tetris* with you looking into a well.

Now imagine how hard it is to play. An interesting, if complicated, follow-up.



TETRIS: THE GRAND MASTER 1998

■ You'll need Jedi-like

reflexes to play this popular Japanese exclusive, so fast the drops fall.



HATRIS 1990

■ Another sequel from Pajitnov with things falling

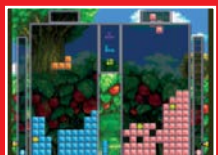
from the sky, but this time it's hats instead of tetraminos.



MAGICAL TETRIS CHALLENGE 1999

■ One of the many Vs Tetris

games. This one is notable for featuring classic Disney characters.



TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN 1993

■ The first *Tetris* game to appear on the SNES. It

features a variety of characters who can unleash special moves upon each other.



TETRIS WORLDS 2001

■ Despite lots of game modes and a four-player mode, many felt

that having blocks that no longer locked into place made it too easy.



TETRIS 2 1993

■ A bizarre follow-up to the massively successful Game Boy original

that has the player clearing bombs by matching lines of the same colour.



TETRIS DS 2006

■ Excellent offering from Nintendo with clever

gameplay modes based around classic characters and good use of the DS's dual screens.



TETRIS PLUS 1995

■ Created by Jaleco, *Tetris Plus* introduces a new puzzle

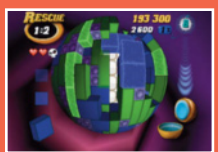
mode that sees you trying to clear a set number of blocks found in the well.



TETRIS BATTLE 2010

■ This Facebook game is a fun competitive

game where you must clear as many lines as possible in two minutes.



TETRISPHERE 1997

■ Confusing N64 exclusive where you must reveal the core of a

large sphere. It's a clever concept but far too fiddly.



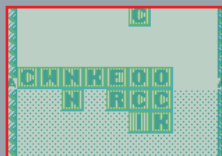
TETRIS 2011

■ The last *Tetris* released for a home console was

this from EA. It's a digital release featuring the classic Marathon Mode.

> WHAT PAJITNOV DID NEXT

How the Tetris creator followed his biggest game



WORDTRIS 1991

■ Another puzzle game with things falling from the sky, but this time it's words instead of tetraminos. *Wordtris* is a clever concept, but it's too tricky.



ICE & FIRE 1995

■ Despite a clever play mechanic revolving around the alternating use of ice and fire, this was a pretty poor shooter. Not one we would recommend when compared to others.



MICROSOFT ENT. PACK: THE PUZZLE COLLECTION 1997

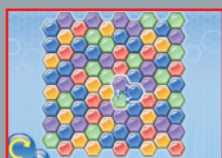
■ An interesting selection of mini puzzle games similar to what Pajitnov had been involved in before *Tetris*. The game shown here is *Fringer*.



PANDORA'S BOX 1999

■ Travel around the world and solve a vast variety of

different puzzles that cover a wide array of different types. The current version has over 400 to solve.



HEXIC 2003

■ Interesting variant of the match-three game where you rotate hexes to

form clusters of three or more. It was a free launch game on 360.



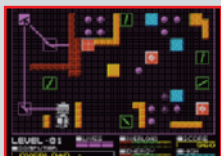
DVICE 2006

■ An interesting spin on *Tetris* where you must destroy incoming ice

blocks and stop them from destroying the houses at the bottom of the screen.

> PUZZLE GAMES INSPIRED BY TETRIS

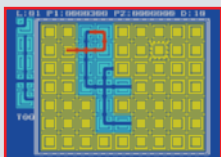
Notable puzzle games that followed Tetris



DEFLECTOR 1987

■ An interesting puzzler from Costa Panayi that had the

player manipulating mirrors to bounce a laser from one point to another.



PIPE MANIA 1989

■ Manage a flow of liquid by manipulating different pipe

shapes in this excellent puzzle game from *The Assembly Line*.



COLUMNS 1990

■ Sega tried to capitalise on the success of *Tetris* with this

simple match-three game. It's decent, but lacks *Tetris*'s addictive properties.



BEJEWELED 2001

■ Popular tile-based puzzle game from PopCap

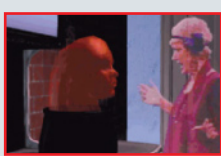
Games where you must match three jewels of the same colour. Maddeningly addictive.



LEMMINGS 1991

■ Excellent game where you have to guide a set

number of suicidal lemmings with specific skills to a nearby exit.



THE 7TH GUEST 1993

■ Innovative offering from Trilobyte which

mixed filmed pre-rendered movie clips with some deviously designed puzzles.



PUZZLE BOBBLE 1994

■ Use the cute dinosaurs from *Bubble Bobble* to fling coloured

bubbles skywards towards other coloured bubbles. Also known as *Bust-A-Move*.



PUZZ LOOP 1998

■ Stop marbles from reaching the goal by shooting additional marbles

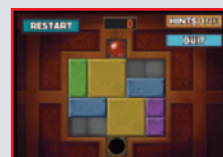
at them to form chains of three or more. PopCap created a variant called *Zuma*.



LUMINES 2004

■ This PSP launch title was a superb effort from *Rez*

creator Tetsuya Mizaguchi that fuses music with block-shifting gameplay.



PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE CURIOUS VILLAGE 2007

■ This charming

DS offering from Level-5 mixes storytelling with clever head-scratchers to great effect. Its most recent sequel is available on 3DS.



WORLD OF GOO 2008

■ Excellent physics-based puzzler that has you trying to get a

certain number of cute oozes to a nearby pipe. It gets pretty tough.



ANGRY BIRDS 2009

■ Use a catapult to fire cute birds at even cuter pigs in Rovio

Entertainment's stupidly popular iOS game. There's even a theme park.

GAME CHANGERS

DOOM

Released: 1993 Publisher: id Software Developer: id Software System: PC



We take an in-depth look at how id Software's venerable title changed the face of first-person shooting forever

THERE ARE MOMENTS in videogames that you never forget. For some it's seeing *Mario* run around a three-dimensional world for the first time, while others will recall the first time they shot through their own base so they could attack the incoming waves of *Space Invaders*. Many more, though, will remember the first time they laid eyes on id Software's epic masterpiece *Doom* – a game that changed PC gaming, and the first-person shooter genre, forever.

Doom wasn't the first game of its kind – it essentially rode the blood-spattered coattails of id Software's very own *Wolfenstein 3D*, a riotous blaster that combined aggressive shooting with The Third Reich. But *Doom's* reach and impact spread far further than *Wolfenstein*, so much so that many gamers actually think the latter came out later.

At one stage *Doom* was everywhere and everyone was playing it. Valve's Gabe Newell once revealed to Bloomberg that when he was working at Microsoft it decided to start checking the computers of customers to find out the extent of Windows' market share. It was done at immense cost to Microsoft and Newell revealed that 20 million people were using Windows.

An impressive figure. That is, of course, until you realise that despite those amazing numbers Windows wasn't the most installed application. It was id Software's *Doom*.

The amazing thing here is that *Doom* wasn't even distributed at a retail level; it was simply distributed via bulletin boards and other pre-internet methods. Newell was astonished at the reach a tiny team of developers could have compared to the 500+ staff of Microsoft, calling it a "lightning bolt" moment. Newell decided that a change was coming and games like *Doom* were the future. He eventually left Microsoft to co-found Valve Software in 1996.

So how did *Doom* become so successful? There are numerous reasons, but the fact it was shareware was incredibly important to the game's overall success. After being downloaded (it was originally available from Software Creations BBS and an FTP server at the University Of Wisconsin-Madison) gamers had access to the entire first episode of the epic blaster (it would eventually consist of four full chapters). Once the chapter was complete it was possible to pay for and unlock the rest of the game. The other benefit of shareware was just that:

ESSENTIAL DOOM MODS

DOOM IS WELL KNOWN FOR ITS MODDING SCENE. HERE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVOURITES...



GHOSTBUSTERS

★ Created by "Scuba Steve" Browning, this is a fun mod that features locations from the film as well as weapons that range from the ghost trap to the PKE Meter and Ecto-1. Power-ups come in the form of Twinkies and the Ghostbuster suit, while bosses include Vigo The Carpathian and the Stay Puft Marshmallow man.



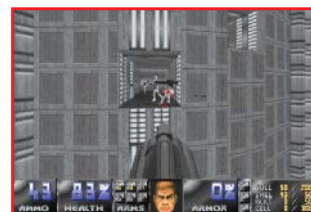
ALIENS TC

★ The TC stands for Total Conversion if you're wondering. It's a PWAD that replaces virtually all the resources of the original with new ones. The result is an impressively accurate adaptation of the film, featuring key scenes and a host of recognisable weapons and beasts.



BATMAN

★ Another total conversion and another mod based on an extremely popular existing franchise. It's notable for having a huge number of recognisable bosses that range from Killer Croc and The Joker to Bane and Penguin. While Batman was created for *Doom 2*, we've played it via *Ultimate Doom* just fine.



STAR WARS DOOM

★ There are a number of *Star Wars* mods available, but we've a soft spot for this one. It has lots of samples from the film, a huge number of weapons that are extremely satisfying to use, a great reproduction of the iconic theme tune and lots of stormtroopers to kill. Impressive, most impressive.

it could be shared, reaching countless other people who would in turn share it with their own friends. It created an amazing distribution system that required very little effort from id's 12-strong team.

■■■ And yet it wasn't just *Doom*'s accessibility that made it such a success. It was an incredibly good game, building on the blueprints that John Carmack and the rest of his team had first experienced with *Wolfenstein 3D* and polishing every aspect of it until it shone. *Doom* was light years ahead of the competition from a technical point of view, boasting all sorts of incredible little touches. Full texture mapping, enhanced lighting, rooms of different heights and stairways were just a few of the improvements over *Wolfenstein*, and they allowed for the creation of some incredibly atmospheric levels.

It also helped that the level design in *Doom* was exemplary. *Wolfenstein 3D* often felt that there was little thought to the structure of each stage (made more confusing by the lack of a map); however, the stages of *Doom* had a purpose and really gave you the impression that you were storming through a complex while fighting off the hordes of Hell. And what demonic monstrosities they were. Grotesque, robot spider hybrids, resurrected marines, flame-

DOOM WAS LIGHT YEARS AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION FROM A TECHNICAL POINT OF VIEW

KEY FACTS

■ The original *Doom* programming team consisted of John Carmack, John Romero, Mike Abrash and Dave Taylor.

■ *Doom* has crossed over into numerous forms of media. Comic books, novels, a board game and a movie starring The Rock have all been released.

■ The original version of *Doom* comprised three nine-level episodes. A fourth episode was added for the release of *Ultimate Doom* in 1995.

■ 10 December 2013 marked the 20th anniversary of *Doom*'s release. Various ports would arrive for several years after.

throwing imps and disgusting cacodemons were just a few of the monsters you faced. Fortunately, your nameless marine was more than capable of dealing with Hell's minions, having access to an array of devastating weapons that ranged from metallic knuckle dusters and a chainsaw to a double-barrelled shotgun and room-clearing BFG 9000.

The huge number of satanic creatures found in the game and the many bloodthirsty ways in which you could dispatch them saw *Doom* constantly courted by controversy, culminating in the infamous Columbine High School Massacre in 1999, when it was discovered that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the duo behind the massacre, had played the game extensively. *Doom* was still banned in Germany as late as 31 August 2011, almost 18 years after its original release, with the panel revealing that it was concerned that "the story played out in *Doom* involved a relentless cycle of gunplay and 'bloody sadistic' violence directed against humans or human-like beings". The same reasons that made it so popular with gamers in the first place.

It wasn't just violence that made id's game so appealing. Networked multiplayer gaming helped establish the now massively popular deathmatch, while the ability to customise and enhance *Doom*'s levels via the use of custom-built WAD files (which stood for Where's All The Data?) ensured that the game's future was only limited by a player's imagination. Sequels and clones quickly followed in the wake of the behemoth that id had created and it's gone on to appear on countless different platforms. It may be 20 years old now, but it remains as fresh as the day it was conceived, delivering an exhilarating slice of hardcore blasting that few of its later peers have managed to match.

GAME CHANGERS


STREET FIGHTER II

Released: 1991 Publisher: Capcom Developer: In-house System: Arcade



Such was its immense popularity, Capcom estimated that *Street Fighter II* had been played by over 25 million Americans in just three short years

We take a look at what made Capcom's classic title one of the greatest fighting games of all time

 YOSHINORI ONO RECENTLY revealed that a next-gen fighting game from Capcom was still a long way off. This probably explains why it's relying on yet another iteration of its massively successful *Street Fighter IV* to help get it through a financially tough period. In many ways it's amazing that we've even got to a situation where a third update of the now-popular franchise can even exist, because it started off with some of the weakest DNA found in modern gaming.

The original *Street Fighter* was noticeable for one thing: its over-the-top pressure-sensitive buttons, which saw your fighter delivering different strength punches and kicks based on how hard said buttons were pushed. Okay, perhaps we're being slightly hard on it, but if anyone had seen the red-haired Ryu crouch in a corner while an American boxer called Mike ineffectively punched at him until time ran out, they'd be forgiven for thinking that *Street Fighter's* legacy would begin and end there.

There were clearly good ideas in the original *Street Fighter*, but it would take designer Yoshiki Okamoto, Konami's arcade hits *Time Pilot* and *Gyruss*, and a genuine accident to fully realise them and turn

Capcom's second *Street Fighter* into a phenomenal worldwide success.

Street Fighter II took the original DNA of Capcom's *Street Fighter* but built upon it impressively. The combatants once again hailed from all parts of the world, but the design of many of them were far more exotic. From the barrel-like arms of Zangief, to the rubbery limbs of Dhalsim, every single character was notably different. Capcom had already had huge success in the West with *Final Fight*, and wanted to replicate this with *Street Fighter II*. It would do this and then some.

Street Fighter's characters may have had a touch of the strange to them – Blanka, anyone? – but they were also grounded in a crazy sort of hyperreality, and even if you couldn't directly associate with them, they at least felt familiar, being based on stereotypes of their regions. Ken was a brash American obsessed with winning, E. Honda was a rotund sumo wrestler with a Sammo Hung-like speed to him, while Chun-Li (the game's only female character) was a Chinese Interpol agent seeking revenge for her murdered father. Their personas may have been skin-deep, but they were nonetheless recognisable, and they

THE BALLAD OF DIRTY KEN | OTHER GAMES IN THE STREET FIGHTER SERIES



STREET FIGHTER

★ This is where it all began for Capcom's franchise. It's a pretty average fighter that has little going for it. The varied locations and characters were a nice touch, but the actual gameplay is rather sedentary, giving little indication of where the franchise would eventually head. A low-key debut for such a killer franchise.



STREET FIGHTER III

★ There are several iterations of *Street Fighter III*, with *Third Strike* being the version of choice among many players. It's notable for introducing the 'Parry' system to the series, but also for its eclectic range of characters, many of which had odd fighting styles. It was recently updated for digital formats like PSN and XBLA.



STREET FIGHTER IV

★ Capcom reignited the fighting franchise with the fourth official instalment of its now hugely successful franchise. Its release heralded a large number of other fighting games, both from other publishers and Capcom. It's notable for the excellent facial animations and several brand new characters.



ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV

★ The latest iteration of *Street Fighter* will be out later this year and adds Hugo, Poison, Elver and Rolento to the already swollen roster of characters. A fifth fighter will also be added, but so far all we know is that she's female. Our bet is that Karin will finally be added.

enabled you to connect with them in a way that the original game never managed.

While these archetypes clearly helped, it was *Street Fighter II*'s stunning visuals, silky-smooth animation and gameplay mechanics that helped secure it a legion of fans. Capcom's brawler was the 14th game to utilise Capcom's CPS-1 technology and the benefits of the new hardware were immediately obvious to anyone who had experienced the original *Street Fighter*.

■■■ Firstly, the character sprites were huge, making the larger fighters like Zangief and E. Honda look incredibly imposing. The backgrounds were also gloriously designed, filled with moving items and people and really capturing the locations that they were based on. But it was the animation where *Street Fighter II* really excelled, though. Watching these fighters as they punched and kicked their way through the tournament was immensely satisfying – especially when they pulled off their special signature moves that were often unique to each character.

STUNNING VISUALS, SMOOTH ANIMATION AND GAMEPLAY MECHANICS HELPED SECURE IT A LEGION OF FANS

KEY FACTS

■ Many CP-1 one boards were cannibalised to create more *Street Fighter II* units. It's why games like *Strider* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* are harder to find now.

■ Balrog is known as M. Bison in Japan, an obvious reference to boxer Mike Tyson. Capcom changed the name in the West to avoid any potential lawsuits with the infamous sporting celebrity.

■ *Street Fighter II* was so popular there was even a 1994 movie. Highlights include Jean-Claude Van Damme as Guile, Kylie Minogue as Cammy and the late Raul Julia as M. Bison.

Capcom utilised the same six-button layout for *Street Fighter II* that had featured in its standard *Street Fighter* cabinets. Three for light, medium and heavy punches, the other three for the same strength kicks. It worked exceptionally well and added a surprisingly deep layer of gameplay to what many assumed was a simple one-on-one fighter. Knowing when it was best to leap in with a heavy kick or to try to outpace your opponent with a light punch was critical to success on higher difficulty levels, but it became paramount when battling humans and more pronounced than in the original game.

For many *Street Fighter II* was their introduction to competitive fighting, something that was further compounded with the release of later games in the series. Particularly *Street Fighter II: The New Challengers*, which featured a single-elimination tournament called Tournament Battle that was played in arcades up and down the country. To the uninitiated you were simply pummeling beautiful-looking sprites into submission, but you soon realised upon playing just how deep the game's waters were. Combos were an integral part of this depth, but had happened completely by accident after Capcom noticed you could add additional hits during the punch timing and decided to leave it in. It would go on to become a staple feature in later *Street Fighters* and many other fighting games.

The impact of *Street Fighter II* was immense. It led to a fierce rivalry with arcade competitor SNK – who had hit back with *Fatal Fury* and its *King Of Fighters* franchise – and helped popularise the genre and spawned countless spin-offs and sequels. In fact, no other 2D fighter has ever had the same impact. Not bad when you consider the franchise's less than auspicious start.



GAME CHANGERS


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Released: 1991 Publisher: Sega Developer: Sonic Team System: Mega Drive



There aren't as many secrets in *Sonic* as there are in *Mario*, but if you're prepared to experiment you will find them.

games™ examines the industry's most important videogames, looking at their influence and what made them so great in the first place and few are as worthy as *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sega's answer to *Mario*

 FLATTERY BY IMITATION is rife within the videogame industry, with one company often emulating the success of another to further its own success. By far one of the biggest examples is Sega's *Sonic The Hedgehog*; a franchise created to compete directly against Nintendo's *Mario* series.

Sega's Master System, while popular in Europe, had failed to make a big impact in the US or Japan, where it trailed massively behind Nintendo's NES. Sega already had a mascot by the name of Alex Kidd, and while he had starred in several popular games, he was no Mario. Wanting to rectify this, Sega had numerous developers submit character designs to its AM8 department and eventually settled on a creation by Naoto Oshima. It was a cute blue hedgehog who was then known as Mr Needlemouse. Created from a number of inspirations that ranged from the shoes of

Michael Jackson to the blue of Sega's corporate logo, Mr Needlemouse was given a spiky 'can do' attitude that would appeal more to Western gamers. He was then handed over to Yuji Naka, who worked in the five-man AM8 development team that would go on to become known as Sonic Team.

Work began on *Sonic The Hedgehog* in April 1990, with Yuji Naka on main programming duties. The small team worked for just over a year, with Sonic finally making his debut on 23 June 1991. *Sonic The Hedgehog* became an immediate success, and before long it had replaced *Altered Beast* as the Mega Drive's pack-in game of choice. The same thing happened on Sega's 8-bit console, with the Master System version (which was completely different to the Mega Drive offering) replacing *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* on the Master System II.



MAGIC MOMENTS

SONIC IS FULL OF MAGIC MOMENTS. IF WE WERE TO PICK JUST THREE, THOUGH, THESE ARE OUR FAVOURITES...



THAT INTRO

★ **FROM THE MOMENT** Sonic rushes across the screen and 'Sega' screams from your TV, the character's iconic status was secured. It's further reinforced by Sonic popping up and wagging his finger, just to show you how Nineties he is.



CHAOS QUEST

★ **REACH THE END** of Act 1 or 2 with 50 rings or more and you'll be transported to Sonic's Special Stage, an awesome level that must be completed in order to retrieve the Chaos Emerald found at the stage's centre.



THE NEED FOR SPEED

★ **THE SPEED OF *Sonic The Hedgehog*** remains one of its best mechanics. It makes even more of an impact when you pick up the relevant power-up and can speed through loops and across collapsible platforms like a hedgehog possessed.

■■■ WHILE THE MASTER System version is an incredibly slick platformer, it's arguably the Mega Drive outing that helped give Sega a much-needed edge over Nintendo. The speed of Sonic was absolutely blistering, making Mario look decidedly sluggish and old hat in comparison. Sonic was cool and spunky and had a much-desired attitude that Nintendo's plumber simply couldn't match. Of course it also helped that *Sonic* was an exceptionally fantastic platformer, and while it lacked the depth of *Super Mario World* (which had debuted some seven months earlier) it was quite clear that there was nothing else like *Sonic* on any other system.

Even if you ignored the breakneck pace at which Sonic ran, there was no denying that it was an aesthetic delight. The abstract designs of Sonic's different worlds (known as zones) further set it apart from the generic-looking environments of many other platformers of the time. Green Hill Zone was full of sharp-edged trees and chequerboard hills, Labyrinth Zone had a distinctly Aztec styling to it, while Star Light Zone offered sparkling backdrops and huge loops to negotiate. Each and every one of Sonic's six main zones (split into acts) were full of detail and featured bright primary colours that perfectly complemented the high speed action that Sonic Team's game offered.

SONIC HAD AN ATTITUDE THAT MARIO SIMPLY COULDN'T MATCH

KEY FACTS

■ Reach the end of an Act with 50 rings or more and Sonic gets the chance to collect a precious Chaos Emerald. Collecting all emeralds unlocks a different ending.

■ The Master System version has a different story to the Mega Drive game, as it's set afterwards. It still features Dr Robotnik, but many of the zones are completely different in design.

■ Such was the success of the Mega Drive pack-in that it enabled Sega to overtake Nintendo's market share for the first time in six years. In 1991 Sega counted for 65 per cent of the console market.

And yet there was more to Sonic than simply moving as fast as possible. While some would later go on to complain that the game was simply about 'pressing right and jumping at the right moment', the level design proved to be as every bit as memorable as *Sonic's* glorious visuals. Although the levels lacked the sheer depth and variety that *Mario* games offered, they still proved a joy to navigate. Let Sonic explore his environments instead of simply racing through them and you soon discover all sorts of delightful secrets tucked away that would lead to rings and various power-ups.

The rings were also a key aspect of *Sonic's* appeal, being a way of earning extra lives or acting as a useful shield. Whenever Sonic hit an enemy he would drop rings if he was carrying them, allowing him to quickly recover any before they disappeared completely. Hit an enemy without them, however, and he's robbed of a life. It's a neat mechanic that still holds up brilliantly today and remains a key component of practically every *Sonic* game since.

Equally memorable was Sonic's nemesis, Dr Robotnik, who would attack Sonic at the end of each final zone with all kinds of crazy contraptions, only to flee in terror when he was finally bested. As Bowser was for Mario, Dr Robotnik proved to be the perfect foil for Sega's new mascot and has hassled him ever since, gaining even more outlandish machines as console technology has continued to grow in power.

With *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sonic Team created an unforgettable platformer that built on the DNA of past games but left its own distinct blueprint for others to follow. Even now, some 22 years after its original release, numerous digital releases ensure that a new generation of gamers are still able to experience that 16-bit magic.

BEFORE SONIC

PLATFORMERS BEFORE SONIC CAME ALONG

PITFALL! 1982



■ The ground-breaking platformer from David Crane

was one of Activision's first big hitters and introduced many key mechanics that would go on to appear in later scrolling platformers.

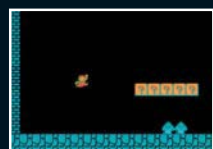
PAC-LAND 1984



■ Interesting *Pac-Man* arcade spin-off that saw the iconic Namco

mascot sprout legs and run through deviously designed stages on his quest to enter Fairyland. It was later ported to numerous home systems.

SUPER MARIO BROS 1985



■ Landmark release from Nintendo that turned Mario into a superstar

and created the template for virtually every *Mario* game that has appeared since. It went on to sell over 40 million units.

WONDER BOY 1985



■ Popular arcade game starring a precocious prehistoric

tyke who used a hammer and skateboard to rescue his beloved girlfriend. *Wonder Boy* later went on to spawn several sequels, including Hudson Soft's *Adventure Island* franchise.

NOTABLE SEQUELS

SONIC HAS APPEARED IN COUNTLESS GAMES. HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THEM...



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 1992

■ This masterful sequel not only improved on the

level design, but also introduced sidekick Miles 'Tails' Prower. It's widely regarded as the best 2D *Sonic* – and rightly so.



SONIC CD 1993

■ This excellent platformer was originally exclusive to the Mega

CD and centred on clever time travel mechanics. It's since been released on numerous digital systems, from iOS to PC.



SONIC & KNUCKLES 1994

■ An experiment that featured lock-on technology

to allow the first three *Sonic* games to be combined with it, creating effects like new levels or the ability to play as Knuckles.



SONIC THE FIGHTERS 1996

■ The concept is sound, but this is an atrocious beat-

'em-up that does no favours to Sonic. He wouldn't appear in a decent fighting game until *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.



SONIC ADVENTURE 1998

■ While it's somewhat ruined by an annoying

central hub, the action stages of *Sonic Adventure* capture the insane excitement of the early 2D *Sonic* games.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2006

■ Sonic's first next-gen outing was quite simply terrible,

with bland level design, floaty controls and annoying camera angles. It marked the first appearance of Silver the Hedgehog.



THE DARK BROTHERHOOD 2008

■ BioWare turns its hand to the *Sonic* universe

with interesting results. The dialogue is a little twee, but it's saved by solid combat and an entertaining story.



SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT 2009

■ Arming Sonic with a sword sounds like another

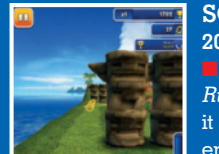
crazy gimmick, but this one actually works. The end result is a solid Wii platformer with a heavy focusing on combo chains.



SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED 2012

■ An excellent racing game that

pits Sonic against other Sega characters. It improves on the original with better tracks and transforming vehicles.



SONIC DASH 2013

■ *Sonic* rips off *Temple Run* and, if we're honest, it makes for a far more entertaining game. There's a lack of levels, but it doesn't hurt your pocket with in-app purchases.

WHAT YUJI NAKA DID NEXT

NON-SONIC GAMES THAT NAKA HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH



RISTAR

1995

■ This entertaining and charming platformer never gets the love it

deserves. Naka was involved with *Ristar*'s design, once revealing that the main character had started off life as a rabbit.



NIGHTS INTO DREAMS

1996

■ A delightful score attack game from Sonic Team that

produced a wonderful feeling of freedom and delivered imaginative boss encounters. Naka was a programmer.



BURNING RANGERS

1998

■ Superb 3D action outing from Sonic Team that sees

the player putting out dangerous fires and rescuing trapped civilians. Naka was on production duties.



LET'S TAP

2008

■ Naka's first project after forming Prope was an interesting selection of mini-

games for the Wii that saw the player tapping on cardboard boxes. The vibrations would then be picked up by the Wii Remote.



IVY THE KIWI?

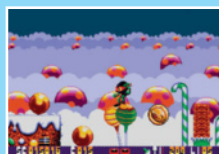
2009

■ An interesting puzzle game where the player must guide Ivy to her

mother by drawing lines that stop her from walking into danger. It's extremely similar to *Kirby: Canvas Curse*.

PLATFORM GAMES INSPIRED BY SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

A SELECTION OF THE MANY GAMES THAT HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY SONIC. SOME GOOD, SOME BAD...



ZOOL

1992

■ Gremlin's *Ninja of the Nth Dimension* was as fast as Sonic,

but the gameplay was nowhere near as impressive and it remains a poor alternative to Sega's popular hedgehog.



AERO THE ACROBAT

1993

■ Task-based platformer featuring a cute

bat. He became a mascot for publisher Sunsoft and secured a sequel in 1994. An effort that's worth investigating.



ZERO THE KAMIKAZE SQUIRREL

1994

■ Zero was Aero's rival, but

became big enough to get his own game. It's surprisingly decent as well, with Zero gliding to get around the large levels.

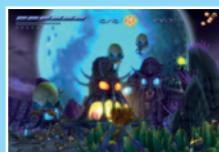


KLONOA: DOOR TO PHANTOMILE

1997

■ Excellent 2.5D platformer from

Namco starring a cute long-eared cat that was remade on Wii. It remains a relatively low-key franchise.



SCALER

2004

■ An interesting oddity from A2M (not to be confused with

Sega's *AM2*) that stars a chameleon who can transform into five distinctive mutant lizards.



AWESOME POSSUM

1993

■ Annoying platformer with an environmental

theme. It's a bad clone of *Sonic* with ropey gameplay and bland design. It did boast large amount of digitised speech, though.



ALFRED CHICKEN

1993

■ *Alfred* is surprisingly good, mainly thanks to

charming visuals and solid level design. A sequel/remake went on to appear on PlayStation in 2002.



CRASH BANDICOOT

1996

■ Excellent 3D platformer from Naughty Dog that

boasted incredible smart level design, great graphics and some truly jaw-dropping technical effects.

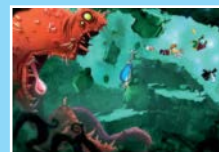


PINOBBE: WINGS OF ADVENTURE

2001

■ This was a launch title for the

GBA and starred a cute bee. While the levels are rather large, floaty controls and bland gameplay let it down.



RAYMAN ORIGINS

2011

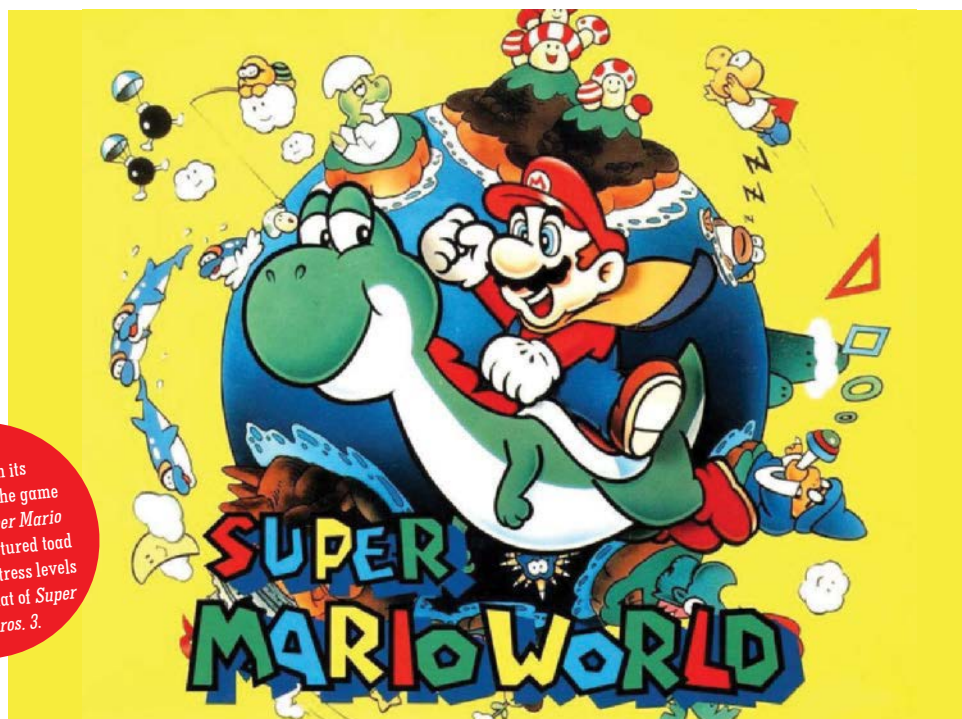
■ Excellent reboot of Michel Ancel's popular

hero that featured clever level design and truly stunning artwork. A sequel, *Rayman Legends*, is due later this year.

GAME CHANGERS

SUPER MARIO WORLD

Released: 21 November 1990 (JP) Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Nintendo EAD System: Super NES/Super Famicom



It's said that in its earliest form, the game was titled *Super Mario Bros. 4* and featured toad houses and fortress levels resembling that of *Super Mario Bros. 3*.

Having defined a genre on the NES, Nintendo perfected its craft with this Super NES masterpiece

HOW DO YOU improve on perfection? That was the challenge Nintendo faced as it embarked on creating a new *Super Mario* game for the next-generation 16-bit Super Nintendo. Somehow, Shigeru Miyamoto and his team found a way.

If there were ever an actual scientific study into why videogames are fun, *Super Mario World* would be the main case study. It's a masterclass in finely tuned game design. A feat of engineering that, above all else, honed the very core of what makes all *Super Mario* games so special: physics.

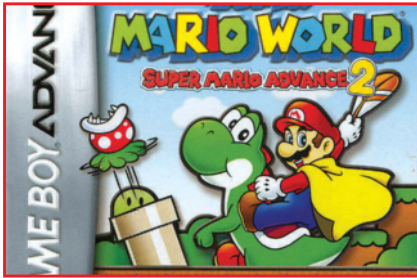
The pre-PlayStation, 2D era of gaming was saturated with side-scrolling platformers no doubt looking to feed off the phenomenal success Nintendo had enjoyed with its mascot throughout the Eighties. While they had all of the face-value features – a cartoony character, a quirky world, and the simple ability to jump, what set *Mario* games apart was a tactile connection between player and plumber that other platformers could rarely replicate.

It's this physics-based game of momentum management that *Super Mario World* nailed. Mario was more controllable than ever before, but still maintained that tangible sense of mass. You were still engaged in what is essentially a battle against Mario's motion, but in *Super Mario World* you felt like you could bounce Mario through levels with the speed and precision of a surgeon with his scalpel.

It's ironic: Sega sold *Sonic* as the super-fast platformer, but while *Sonic's* latter stages stunted his speed by punishing players who tried to rush through its barrage of awkwardly-placed obstacles, *Super Mario World* featured impeccable level design that rewarded fast, flowing play. Those who learned to carry Mario's speed from one platform to the next could make daunting chasms seem a nuisance.

Mario's nimble responsiveness and sharp movement combined with a collection of ingeniously composed sound effects to create an almost

A WORLD OF SUPER MARIO | SUPER MARIO WORLD'S LEGACY STRETCHES FAR BEYOND THAT CURRY-STAINED SNES CART



GRAB THE PORTS

★ Purists will know that the GBA version was made easier, perhaps for the small screen. However, you can get fairly vanilla *SMW* action from the Virtual Console offerings on Wii and Wii U. The latter is glorious in HD.



WATCH THE CARTOON

★ *Super Mario World* spawned a cartoon of its own that spanned across 13 episodes and made several nostalgia-inducing nods to the game with music, locations and characters lifted straight from the SNES classic.



GO FOR A SPEED RECORD

★ *Super Mario World* still has a highly active and still-evolving speed-running community – madly skilled folk who sprint through the game in record times. The ten-minute barrier has been smashed. You think you're good at *Mario*?

inexplicably satisfying tactility with everything Mario does. Then there's that cape. Very little about the Mario universe makes any sense, but the cape item and its gliding manoeuvre introduced admittedly quirky, yet technically impressive aerodynamics. Mario had to sprint to build up speed and then, like the superheroes he's obviously parodying, he would thrust skywards, before nose-diving and using his speed to catch the wind in his cape.

Unlike other *Mario* power-ups, which offered the player an instantly accessible buff, the cape required skill to be used to its fullest. The timing required to keep Mario airborne was tricky, but once mastered, it could allow him to soar through an entire stage, and even access otherwise impossible-to-reach areas.

The jump to 16-bit tech did wonders for *Mario*, and the overworld map was a spectacle of curiosity as you wondered what challenges each area held. Levels looked better than ever with details that made *Super Mario Bros. 3* look archaic. Lava glowed with heat and caves echoed with every sound. Dark levels that forced Mario to activate a light switch before proceeding were ingenious back in 1991.

THE JUMP TO 16-BIT TECH DID WONDERS FOR MARIO, AND THE OVERWORLD MAP WAS A SPECTACLE OF CURIOSITY

KEY FACTS

■ It apparently took 16 people around three years to develop the game. Miyamoto was said to have been dissatisfied with the end result due to a lack of character emotion, but has since said it is his favourite *Mario* game.

■ The GBA version seemed identical, but it was actually made easier; when hit, a powered-up Mario (flower/cape etc.) would become big Mario. In the original, a hit taken in any form would result in small Mario status.

■ Much of the music in the game is actually the same simple melody played at different speeds.

Mario could even jump onto the back of a green dinosaur we'd come to know as Yoshi. Even that was a technical feat back then; Miyamoto is said to have wanted to include Yoshi in earlier *Super Mario* games, but the NES proved incapable of such a feat.

This was Yoshi's debut appearance. Little did we know how much of a star he would become in later years. In *Super Mario World*, Yoshi was little more than a whimsical sidekick that Mario would ride on through stages for his powerful ability to eat any threats in Mario's path. So trivial was Yoshi, that Mario would ditch him remorselessly when he needed an extra kick of altitude.

■■■ Perhaps the best testament to the quality of *Super Mario World* is how well it's stood the test of time. While previous games in the series clearly show their age, *Super Mario World* seems immortal. Its simple, yet charming 2D sprites still look fantastic on a massive 1080p display, its music still has players whistling along in nostalgic glee, and its difficulty curve transitions smoothly from a stroll on a pleasant Sunday morning to a cage fight with a pack of pitbulls. These were the days when videogames actually tried to kick your arse.

It's only deserving, then, that Nintendo has offered no shortage of ways to experience its retro masterpiece over the years. The GBA version, *Super Mario Advance 2: Super Mario World*, brought the game to the portable screen, and both the Wii and Wii U have been graced with a digital version of the game via their respective marketplaces.

Super Mario World continues to place high up in 'best game of all time' lists, and so too should it be high on your list of golden oldies to relive whenever the chance should arise.

GAME CHANGERS

MYST

Released: 24 September 1993 Publisher: Brøderbund Developer: Cyan System: Mac OS



Myst sold 6.3 million units in just nine years – and is still widely celebrated by many as one of the game's that made the CD-ROM into a killer format.

Developed by a sibling duo – Robyn and Rand Miller – *Myst* was one of the first games to popularise the CD-ROM and succeeded in setting up the non-violent adventure genre, too. We explore the inception and creation of the game, and the impact it had on the industry...

ON ITS RELEASE, *Myst* sat upon the knife-edge of public opinion – it was precariously balanced, with one side of the gaming hardcore lauding its unique approach to exploration and atmosphere, whilst others lamented its slow-burning, plodding layout.

Thing is, that didn't matter – *Myst*'s success wouldn't lie within the devotees of gaming back in the early Nineties, no: it was the general public that *Myst* grabbed by the optic nerves, refusing to let go until players unaccustomed to games had finished the title's final mind-bending puzzle. Despite some underwhelming reviews, *Myst* was the best-selling PC game of *all time* for years after its release. It remained best-seller for just under a decade, *The Sims* took its crown in 2002, nine years after *Myst*'s release.

Myst began life as an experiment – originally meant to be an interactive children's book, where clicking on various items on the picture pages would take you deeper into the book itself. *Myst*'s then-unique UI has its origins here, it was then expanded by Cyan's desire to experiment with interactive storytelling and the creation of non-linear worlds – which, in 1993, seemed more like a pipe dream than a reasonable result.

After creating two children's games, iterating on the core design philosophies that came from that original picture book idea, Cyan was approached by a Japanese publisher (Sunsoft) who wanted the developer to work on a game for an older audience. Cyan had already pitched what would become *Myst*

THE ANATOMY OF MYST

MYST MIGHT HAVE BECOME THE DE FACTO TEMPLATE OF THE PUZZLE GENRE, BUT WHAT INFLUENCED IT IN THE FIRST PLACE?



SURREAL ART

★ Robyn Miller – one of the games developers – painted surreal art on canvases during his adolescence: you can see the impact in-game.



THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

★ Jules Verne's 1874 fiction provided much inspiration to Cyan – the game even took its name from part of the book that was set on an uncharted island in the South Pacific.



HYPERCARD

★ Cyan has stated the game wouldn't even exist without Macintosh's very own programming software (ironic considering *Myst's* PC success).

to Western publishers – namely Activision – but the fledgling publisher rejected the idea, wanting Cyan to stick to kid's games.

Funded by Sunsoft, Cyan began work on *Myst* – which would be completed two years later. One of the core tenets of the game's design was to make it not feel like a PC game – hence the transparent UI that would set the standard for all exploration/mystery games to come after. More than that, though, *Myst* set the standard for immersion in games; its world was incredibly realistic for its time, and needed very little introduction or illustration to let players understand how to play it.

But it wasn't just the graphics that won people over – beautiful and immersive as they may be, *Myst* was also supported by a fantastic ambient soundtrack with music composed by Robyn Miller, one of the brothers that oversaw production at Cyan. Originally, the game was built without music (the developers thought that the score would detract from the overall impact of the game), but after extensive work, a 40-track synthesized OST was incorporated into the game to great effect.

Still, Chris Brandkamp (responsible for the game's ambience and sound effects) opted to compose the world's nascent audio with the same philosophy in

THE CONSTANT QUALITY OF SOUND AND GRAPHICS FED INTO THE OPEN WORLD LEVEL DESIGN

KEY FACTS

■ The development team often used to imagine their grandparents trying to play the game when attempting to simplify the UI.

■ *Myst* contains 2,500 frames throughout the whole game – one for each possible area the player can explore.

■ A parody game, *Pyst*, was released in 1996 – it had no gameplay and featured only an island vandalised by frustrated *Myst* players.

■ The PC version of *Myst* could be bought packaged with a CD-ROM Drive, which was not yet a common item on PC towers.

mind: realism. Sounds were intentionally amplified to act as a soundtrack of sorts in itself: the team wanted realism, they wanted to convey mood through the sound of waves, of gears, of psithurism. It's another string to the game's immersive bow. This design philosophy was doubled down on in the game's sequel, *Riven*.

The constant quality of the sound and graphics fed into the open world level design – which was built intentionally so the player could get lost in it. This approach to what was essentially a puzzle game (which were ostensibly linear at the time) really shook up the genre. It showed developers and players alike that you could build a world first and foremost, and then shape the gameplay elements around the realism later.

■■■ This open world was fleshed out with a story that, again, for its time was a revelation. You were a silent protagonist – The Stranger – who was more of a reactionary force than an active one. You were played off against two brothers that aimed to undo all the work their father had done on the island, and it all played out in a totally non-violent way. The art of the world was therefore constructed to keep the player intrigued, guide them on when there was fairly little action to keep them plugged in.

With its minimalist controls (mouse-based movement and one action button), its cinematic presentation and its lack of any distinct action, *Myst* frustrated as many people as it enraptured. But in 1993, when most people owned computers for word processing, spreadsheets or other miscellaneous tasks, *Myst* was a revelation – it was one of the first games to take advantage of the CD-ROM, packing the disc to the brim with sound, graphical texture and world size, and was no doubt revolutionary in bringing casual players into the PC gaming world.

GAME CHANGERS

Super Mario 64

Released: 1996
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
System: N64



gamesTM examines the industry's most important videogames, looking at their influence and what made them so great. This month we kick things off with Super Mario 64, the most important 3D platformer of all time

THE BEST TRANSITION FROM 2D TO 3D IN RECENT GAMING MEMORY



EARLY GAMES OFTEN struggled when they made the jump from 2D to 3D. Franchises that had been so fun to play in 2D suddenly lost part of their charm. When Mario made his debut on the N64, however, he suffered from no such problems. In fact, it's safe to say that his exciting arrival shaped the genre for years to come, while proving that classic franchises could make the supposedly difficult transition to 3D.

And Nintendo certainly knew what it was doing when it unleashed Mario in his new 64-bit playground, giving him a slew of new abilities that allowed him to interact with the game world in new and exciting ways. Creator Shigeru Miyamoto had built *Super Mario 64* specifically around the N64's controller, and the result offered a natural play experience that effortlessly highlighted Mario's many new abilities. The revitalised plumber could scramble up trees and somersault off them, crouch to get into small nooks and crannies, shimmy along narrow passageways, gingerly tip-toe past sleeping enemies, punch foes

BEFORE SUPER MARIO 64

I, Robot

Released: 1983



■ Although not strictly a platformer, this was the first arcade game to use filled 3D polygons to create an imaginative game world. Dave Theurer's creation was a financial flop, but has since gone on to receive cult status.

3D Ant Attack

Released: 1983



■ This isometric adventure from Sandy White had you searching the ruined city of Anteschur for your sweetheart, while avoiding deadly ants. Amazingly innovative for its time, it's largely responsible for the popularity of isometric 3D in home computers.

MAGIC MOMENTS

IT'S-A-ME, MARIO!



■ IT WAS IMPRESSIVE enough when your N64 booted up and you were greeted by the mesmerising

face of Mario. It became even more impressive when you realised that you could use the N64's controller to contort his face into all sorts of crazy positions.

BOWSER BY THE TAIL



■ BOWSER FIGHTS HAVE always been memorable, but the power of the N64 allowed Miyamoto's

team to show off. Grabbing the gigantic turtle by his tail and constantly spinning him, before throwing into the ether, elicits a wonderful sense of joy.

TAKING FLIGHT



■ *SUPER MARIO BROS 3* gave you a tantalising taste of flight, but even that couldn't prepare

you for the sheer freedom you felt upon discovering the Wing Cap in *Super Mario 64*. A fantastic moment that still feels immensely satisfying.

that got too close to him, deliver a devastating new bottom bounce, and pull off long jumps, triple jumps and backflips with ease. He was incredibly athletic despite his rotund appearance, but his new skills weren't just to show off the power of Nintendo's new console. Mario's many new skills represented a smorgasboard of choices for the player, allowing him or her to approach Mario's levels in ways that just hadn't been possible in previous platformers.

Super Mario 64's level design was absolutely exemplary. Princess Peach's castle served as a huge hub, with its many rooms allowing Mario to be transported to exciting new game worlds called courses. Admittedly, many of the courses on offer were the staple diet of past platformers – a generic-looking ice world here, an obvious desert world there – but never had they been realised so fully in a game before Nintendo's magnificent release.

UNLIKE PREVIOUS *MARIO* games that presented game worlds split across a set number of levels, the courses of *Super Mario 64* consisted of just one, beautifully designed stage. Each stage was filled with missions that ranged from collecting a set number of red coins to retrieving sunken treasure, racing penguins or facing off against a selection of mini-bosses. Once a mission had been completed Mario would be rewarded with a star. The real beauty of this approach was that the player was allowed to make their own choices throughout each stage, and while each mission was presented to the player in a specific order, it was possible to complete them out of sequence by simply being curious about the

game world. This is *Super Mario 64's* biggest strength because it's constantly challenging the player. Sure you might see a star within tantalising reach, but first you must consider what skills in your considerable repertoire will allow you to acquire it.

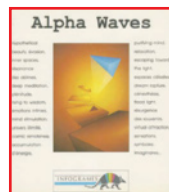
This same approach applies to the way Mario accessed new worlds as well. Virtually every door in Peach's castle had a number on it, which could only be opened once Mario had collected a specific number of stars. Again these doors can be opened in any order (providing you have the set number of stars), building on the multi-path approach that earlier Mario games took. Although *Super Mario 64's* worlds are fairly generic in their approach, their design is beautiful, with the clean, simple textures still impressing today. As the game progressed, however, the visuals became more elaborate and imaginative, with courses like Tiny-Huge Island and Tick Tock Clock really allowing the developers to run riot. Miyamoto had originally planned over 40 courses but memory issues meant that many were dropped, leaving the player with 15 main courses.

Return to *Super Mario 64* today and its influence can be seen in virtually every game you care to look at. Rockstar's Sam Houser once revealed in an interview with *The New York Times* that "Anyone who makes 3D games who says they've not borrowed something from *Mario* or *Zelda* is lying, from the games on Nintendo 64, not necessarily the ones from today". After getting lost in Mario's enchanting world all over again and witnessing the magical touch of Miyamoto in action, we're inclined to agree.

The platformers that were dominant before Super Mario 64 came along

Alpha Waves

Released: 1990



■ This experimental game was released on the Atari ST, before being ported to the Amiga and

PC. It arrived a full six years before *Super Mario 64* and combines exploration with platform-styled gameplay.

Jumping Flash!

Released: 1995



■ This inventive effort from Exact Co drew great acclaim in the early days of the PlayStation, as there was nothing quite like it on the system. Unlike

Super Mario 64 it utilises a first-person perspective and is a far more arcade-like experience.

Bug!

Released: 1995



■ *Bug!* was one of the Saturn's earliest platformers, with the annoyingly voiced insect filling in for Sonic, who was absent at

launch. It uses clever graphic techniques to create the illusion of 3D, but is otherwise a conventional platformer.

KEY FACTS

■ A 3D *Super Mario* using the FX chip was allegedly in development for the SNES, but Dylan Cuthbert recently debunked this rumour.

■ *Super Mario 64* sold incredibly well for Nintendo, shifting over 11 million units. It's unclear how many of these were based on the N64's pack-in promotion.

■ In addition to being built around the N64's controller, Shigeru Miyamoto and his team also built *Super Mario 64* around its camera and characters.

■ *Mario 64* didn't just influence platformers; Rare's Martin Hollis revealed that *GoldenEye's* mission structure was borrowed from it too.



SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Released: 2007

■ THE WII'S first 3D *Mario* upped the ante for the

franchise and the genre in general by introducing all sorts of clever play mechanics. Gravity-based levels were the most obvious, but new power-ups like the Bee and Spring suit also took the gameplay in a fresh direction.

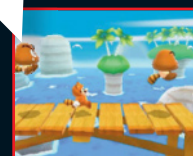


SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2

Released: 2010

■ SOMEHOW THIS superb sequel managed

to improve on virtually every aspect of its incredible predecessor. Levels design was exemplary, the introduction of Yoshi offered new gameplay options, while the level structure and approach feels more like *Super Mario 64*.

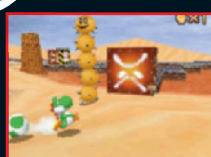


SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

Released: 2011

■ GREAT THINGS were expected from the first 3DS *Mario*

game and developers Nintendo EAD Tokyo did not disappoint. Ably assisted by Brownie Brown and DigitalScape, the focus was to make a 3D *Mario* game that played like a 2D one, which was effortlessly achieved.



SUPER MARIO 64 DS

Released: 2004

■ THIS LAUNCH title for the DS featured

a number of notable enhancements, making it worthy of inclusion here. In addition to letting you play as Luigi, Wario and Yoshi, it also introduced a host of excellent mini-games built around the DS's controls.



SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

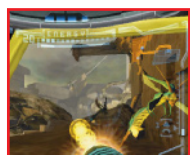
Released: 2002

■ WHILE THE GameCube's first *Mario* title introduced an

occasionally wonky camera, it also saw the debut of FLUDD. The Flash Liquidizing Ultra Dousing Device was an excellent item that helped Mario defeat bosses and tackle obstacles.

THE SEQUELS

WH HAPP NE



METROID PRIME

Released: 2002

■ WHILE THE core game was created by Retro Studios, Miyamoto had

an important role in *Metroid Prime*'s development. Originally intended as a third-person shooter, Miyamoto consistently steered the direction of the game to something that was more his liking. The tough love was worth it, as it became **games™**'s first 10/10.



PIKMIN

Released: 2001

■ MIYAMOTO HAS often based his games on his own

personal experiences. While he's never visited another planet (as far as we know) he is a keen gardener. *Pikmin*'s inspiration comes from Miyamoto's love of gardening and it morphed into an intriguing strategy game with interesting game mechanics.

WHAT SHIGERU MIYAMOTO DID NEXT

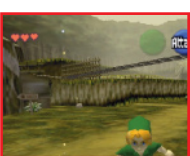


NINTENDOGS

Released: 2005

■ ORIGINALLY BEGINNING life as a GameCube demo, *Nintendogs* came about when

Miyamoto bought a dog for his family. It turned into one of the DS's most popular games, well received by both critics and gamers alike, and eventually going on to sell over six million units. A sequel with added cats launched on the 3DS in 2011.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

Released: 1998

■ MIYAMOTO SHARED directing

duties with Yochi Yamada, Yoshiaki Koizumi and Eiji Aonuma on *Ocarina Of Time*. The end result was a fantastic addition to the *Zelda* series that, like *Super Mario 64* before it, effortlessly crossed the two dimensional boundary into 3D.



STARFOX 64

Released: 1997

■ THIS WAS an incredible sequel to the SNES game

that offered operatic space battles, a new multiplayer mode and the new 'All-Range Mode', which removed the on-rails gameplay for certain parts of the game. Miyamoto worked in a producing role on this title, but his touch throughout is obvious.

AT ENED XT

Super Mario 64 was a revolutionary platformer that changed the genre. Here we look at its impact on the industry, examining its sequels, the many games it inspired and what its talented creator did next

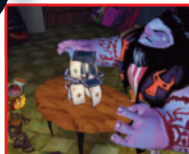
THE
KEY 3D
PLATFORMERS
THAT
FOLLOWED



SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE

Released: **2011**
■ **SPYRO WAS**
first released

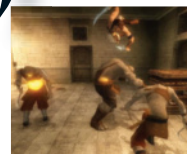
as a conventional platformer in 1998, but the franchise was rebooted with phenomenal success in 2011. Now known as *Skylanders*, it featured unique toys that would come to life onscreen when placed on the Portal Of Power.



PSYCHONAUTS

Released: **2005**
■ **TIM SCHAFER**
has gone on
record to say that
Super Mario 64

influenced his quirky 2005 release. Boosted by a magnificent story and genuinely interesting characters, it's an interesting addition to the platformer that has all the usual quirkiness you'd expect from a Double Fine game.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Released: **2003**
■ **JORDAN
MECHNER**

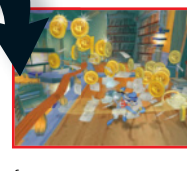
returned to his critically acclaimed Apple II game, reinvigorating both the genre and the franchise with the excellent *Sands Of Time*. It's as much a puzzler as a platformer, with the player having to work out the best route.



JAK & DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY

Released: **2001**
■ **WHILE MANY**
aspects of
the gameplay

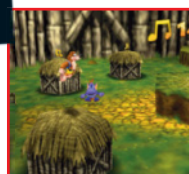
were fairly conventional, it featured impressive behind the scenes work, delivering a seamless world free of mid-game loads, a complete lack of fogging and impressive high resolution textures.



SLY COOPER AND THE THIEVIUS RACCOONUS

Released: **2002**
■ **THIS CLEVER**
platformer

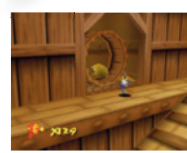
features an entertaining cast of cuddly heroes, clever level design and some imaginative boss fights. Like *Rayman*, the gameplay is fairly conventional, but its rich world and fun characters make it well worth returning to.



BANJO-KAZOOIE

Released: **1998**
■ **RARE'S OWN**
love letter to
Super Mario 64
also helped take
the platformer in

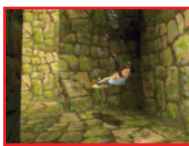
new and exciting directions. It featured the same mission-structured base of *Super Mario 64*, but included two main characters who could interact with each other in a number of interesting ways to slowly unlock the huge game world.



EARTHWORM JIM 3D

Released: **1999**
■ **SHINY
ENTERTAINMENT**
unfortunately
felt ill-equipped to

work on this 3D sequel, so development was handed over to VIS Entertainment. The end result was sadly a plodding and laborious platformer, which, while it could be funny in places, just couldn't compare favourably to Jim's 2D original adventures.



TOMB RAIDER

Released: **1996**
■ **ALTHOUGH
TECHNICALLY**
more rightly
classified as

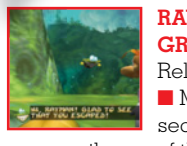
an action/adventure game, there's more than enough platforming elements in Lara's first adventure to justify its inclusion here. It lacks *Mario's* impressive 3D camera, but it nevertheless offers a fantastic sense of scale, particularly on later levels.



SONIC ADVENTURE

Released: **1998**
■ **THERE WAS** a
lot riding on Sega's
first proper 3D
Sonic platformer,

and *Sonic Adventure* didn't really disappoint. The action stages easily captured the essence of the massively successful 2D games. It was later rereleased on GameCube, Xbox 360 and PS3.



RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE

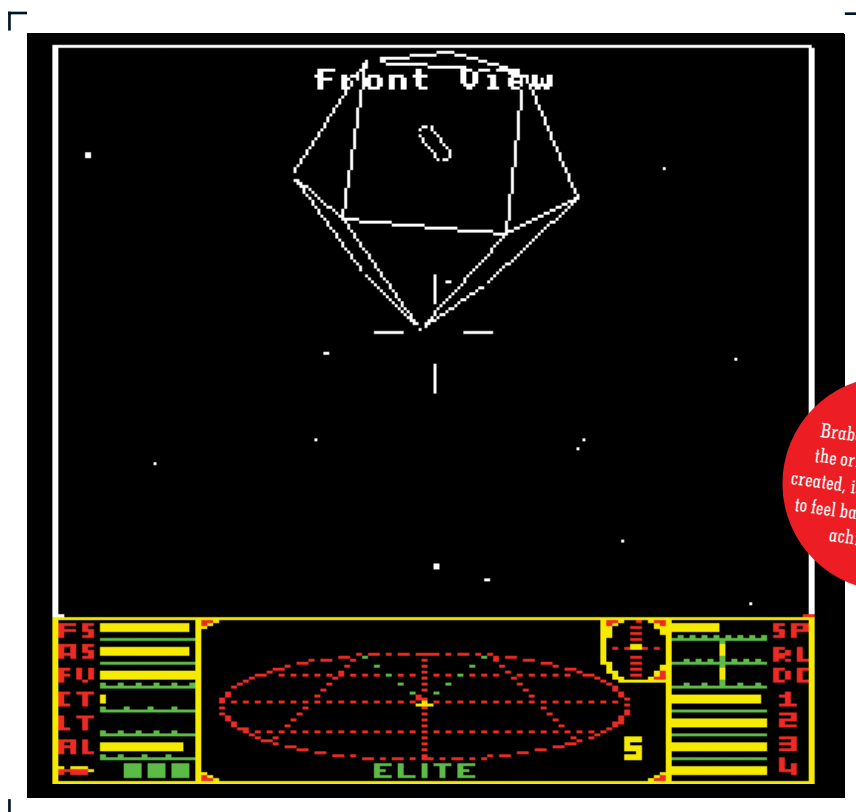
Released: **1999**
■ **MICHEL ANCEL'S**
second *Rayman* game

was easily one of the most impressive 3D platformers around and a huge improvement over his original game, being immensely playable. While the gameplay is fairly linear compared to the approach of *Super Mario 64*, it's full of neat little touches and plenty of sly humour.

GAME CHANGERS

ELITE

Released: 1984 Developer: Acornsoft System: BBC Micro



David Braben was 20 when the original *Elite* was created, in case you needed to feel bad about your life achievements.

How did David Braben and Ian Bell steer gamers into a revolutionary open sandbox 3D world? We take a closer look at the incredible space adventuring of *Elite*

IN THE EARLY days of computing, the vast majority of games were small in scope and rather casual. Whether they involved trying to score more points than an opponent in a game of virtual ping-pong or moving a character across platforms in a linear title with three lives they, in some sense, restricted the player by asking for prescribed tasks to be performed.

Elite changed the way games were perceived by opening up the game world, leaving players to largely get on with the task in hand and not giving them a time limit. Where some games could be over and done with in 20 minutes, *Elite* could swallow up an entire afternoon, eat into an evening and cause a few missed hours of sleep too. The space trading game, *Elite*, set a new standard, and it would prove to be influential for decades to come.

The game was the product of a collaboration between university friends David Braben and Ian Bell. Braben loved physics and astronomy. Indeed, one of the first programs he wrote on a computer was an expanding star field, and he really wanted to fly through it. The BASIC program wasn't fast enough, however, so he learned machine code on his Acorn Atom and created some 3D graphics, including third-dimension spaceships. Bell, meanwhile, was busy coding a game for Acornsoft called *Free Fall*. *Elite* was born when Braben asked Bell if he could help turn his graphics into a game, and the pair spent ages figuring out just how it could be done.

Starting on the planet Lave, the gamer took control of a Cobra Mk III spacecraft. 100 credits ensured that fuel and cargo could be bought, albeit a meagre amount. Players could use the spaceship to make

ELITE: KEY ELEMENTS | FOUR REASONS WHY ELITE STOOD OUT IN 1984



RIGHT PLACE + TIME

★ The games industry was in its infancy, and *Elite*, as the first space trading game, was able to rip up the rules that previous games had laid down. That included the score, three lives rule and time limits that were demanded by publishers at the time.



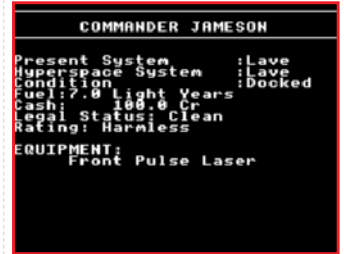
IT WAS OPEN WORLD

★ Space is as sandbox-like as you could get, and Bell and Braben realised this. By providing the spacecraft, asteroids, planets and stars, players were able to fill in their own story. Whether firing lasers or exploring, gamers made their own experience.



HUGE AMBITION

★ Gamers received a weighty list of instructions, and often had trouble getting started. Docking on a planet was hard too, but then aligning ships and matching rotation rates is never easy. It was released on 25 devices – the most of any space trading game ever.



FIRST TRUE 3D GAME

★ *Defender* and *Galaxians*, for example, were 2D space games and in 1984, 3D wasn't seen as possible. But the wireframe 3D graphics changed the way people looked at games and it changed the way they could be played. It was unlike any experience preceding it.

more money by trading goods. Not only would this make a healthy profit, but it would provide the means to enhance the spaceship. But at first players had to tread carefully, for only by being financially prudent would they be able to get more money and cargo with which to trade, mastering the art of flying so that they could swiftly get to a suitable destination of their own choosing and offload their wares.

■■■ EXPERIENCE AND COLD hard cash would ease the path to success and help a gamer climb from harmless to poor; average to above average; competent to dangerous and finally deadly to elite. How this was achieved was entirely up to the player, this freedom made possible by an advanced game engine that was achieved using just 22k of code.

It was a masterpiece of programming. Although Braben and Bell have said they were merely doing the best they could on the BBC Micro, they didn't let commercial considerations compromise what they thought would be a really good game. For them, it was about showcasing what a game could achieve and producing a title that they would want to play themselves using realistic physics – for its day at least. However, Thorn EMI infamously turned it down because it did not fit into the predetermined vision the company had of games. That in itself showed that *Elite* was something extraordinary.

FOR THEM, IT WAS ABOUT SHOWCASING WHAT A GAME COULD ACHIEVE

KEY FACTS

■ *Elite* was the first ever game to use procedural generation. This is when content is generated algorithmically. *Elite* was planned to have 282 trillion galaxies, but that was ultimately reduced to eight.

■ Robert Holdstock wrote a novella which was bundled with the game. Called *The Dark Wheel*, it told of Rock Hermits who mined asteroids.

■ Bell and Braben fell out in 2000 when Bell released *Elite* into the public domain. The pair, however, appeared to put their differences aside when they spoke at GameCity in Nottingham in 2009.

Whether or not Braben and Bell would have chosen a non-space theme had they more memory to play with is irrelevant. For here the wireframe 3D graphics with hidden line removal proved outstanding in an era still getting to grips with advancing 2D visuals. Fuel pods and salvage pods would make for a better ship and ease navigation and collecting. Extra missiles and beam lasers could be purchased and players could make great use of the galactic hyperdrive. It mimicked real life in that sense – the feeling being that the better players became, the more financially rewarding it would be.

At times it would feel lonely – just a gamer flying through a black atmosphere. Then all hell would break loose and players would need to be completely alert, mashing the keys as palms became sweaty and eyes popped, daring not to blink as attempts were made to get to that destination, be it a world, asteroid or fellow spacecraft.

Along the way there were pirates to blow out of the sky, items to steal and goods to trade. *Elite* was complex stuff and tried to be as realistic as possible. Different worlds yielded their own positives: an agricultural world would have basic machinery, spare parts, food and raw materials unless they were well off, in which case they would be more advanced. Industrial worlds would need these raw materials and food. They would want the higher tech machinery as well as medicines and beds.

In some ways it was political too. Slaves, narcotics and firearms could be traded – and these black market items fetched a decent price even if they did put your legal status in doubt. But it all helped to redefine how a game should be, and it is perhaps why 25,681 Kickstarter backers pledged £1,578,316 to fund a sequel, *Elite: Dangerous*. They know a game-changer when they see one.



GAME CHANGERS


POKEMON RED/ BLUE/YELLOW

Released: 1996 (Japan), 1998 (US), 1999 (UK) Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Game Freak System: Game Boy

Red Version



Pokémon created a new generation of role-playing fans with the most brilliantly simple of youth-friendly ideas: collecting and swapping...

 MANY OF THE kids who picked up *Pokémon* had probably never heard of an RPG before. When *Red* and *Blue* arrived in 1999, the franchise had already blown up in the UK since the game released a year earlier in the US, with interest ballooning in the awful animated cartoon, the frankly odd-looking pocket monsters themselves and later the accompanying card game. It was a terrifyingly large craze that just happened to bring a somewhat niche genre to an enormous young audience, via some classically savvy Nintendo-branded game design.

This many years later, it's obvious that the game component of Pokémon had a kind of timeless merit, while other parts of the operation did not. The cartoon was far from impressive to look at, and could be painfully cheesy; the character designs only got progressively worse from Voltorb, Electrode and Ditto;

the card game isn't the force it once was. *Pokémon Red*, *Blue* and later *Yellow* marked, for the young generation of the late Nineties, their first experiences of an RPG and the trappings of its mechanics, channelled beautifully through a well-structured adventure that challenged players to catch and level up their own pocket monsters. Players were offered complete customisation of their battle line-up in a world populated with almost 150 creatures to catch. They were all out there, somewhere – and only determined exploration, as well as collaboration with your friends, would reveal them all.

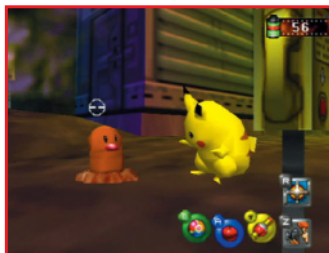
The compulsive mentality it tapped into for kids was very much the same thing that leads them to complete football sticker albums, or – a more modern example – finding diamonds in *Minecraft*. It's that completionist attitude, married to the ingeniously unpredictable

HOW IT TOOK OVER THE EARTH | POKÉMON CONQUERED THE NINETIES AND BEYOND – THIS IS WHY IT HAPPENED



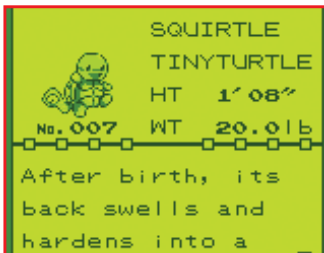
MULTIMEDIA

★ Trading cards, LCD Tamagotchi facsimiles, toys and the somewhat repetitive TV show; Pokémon is a pop culture megalodon that dominates multiple forms of media. The card game isn't as massive these days, but it was all over playgrounds in the late Nineties.



CONSOLE SPIN-OFFS

★ Pokémon's tendrils extended beyond the Game Boy, too, with amusing but thin N64 titles *Pokémon Snap* and *Stadium* finding significant success. A forgotten and reportedly rubbish curio, *Hey You Pikachu!*, allowed you to speak to the electric rodent.



ICONOGRAPHY

★ We'd argue that Pokémon design has become uninspired in recent years, and even *Red* and *Blue* had the likes of Voltorb and Exeggcutte to make the whole thing seem embarrassing. At the same time, many of the creatures were brilliantly designed.



CONSISTENCY

★ While the number bloated from 150 monsters to an exhausting 649 today, Pokémon has remained a very strong franchise. The task of catching them all is more intimidating than it used to be, but every generation has allowed the series to find new fans.

process of catching Pokémon, that underlined the appeal of *Red* and *Blue*.

Yet it was the social interaction side of things that really altered industry thinking. *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* promoted use of the Game Boy's relatively obscure link cable as its founding conceit, that players would swap their Pokémon and battle with them using a pretty dusty old peripheral. The two different versions had 11 interchangeable monsters that could only be found on either *Red* or *Blue*, as well as four that could solely be obtained through trading with a fellow player; to complete your collection, *Pokémon* required you to interact with friends in order to get there, and many did. It opened up the potential of multiplayer experiences on handhelds in a way that we hadn't seen before.

■■■ THERE WAS SOMETHING oddly powerful about the idea of sending a Pokémon that you'd raised over to a friend and receiving a new one in return. Pokémon, after all, is basically about the battles you fight and the creatures you fight them with – there was a sense of investment in that that's still entirely unique to this franchise.

But the other, more adrenaline-fuelled half of the link cable functionality was arguably the most exciting part of it all. The combat component to the multiplayer was essential, bridging two players'

POKÉMON BROUGHT A NICHE GENRE TO AN ENORMOUS YOUNG AUDIENCE

KEY FACTS

■ When you catch all 150 Pokémon, you're given a Game Freak diploma in Celadon City. Not that exciting, really. We'd at least want a key to the city from the mayor.

■ Pokémon actually began life as 'Capsule Monsters' in 1990, and was put on hold as the team at Game Freak worked on Yoshi. The first early design for Lapras existed then.

■ Combined, *Pokémon Red*, *Blue*, *Yellow* and *Green* (the Japanese original version of *Blue*) have sold over 30 million units in total. They still reign as the highest in the series.

massive adventures and adding some genuine personal stakes as you pit your two sets of monsters against each other. Players could strategise in these scraps, instead of contending with frequently silly AI that spams nothing attacks like Tail Whip and Growl in the midst of crucial battles. An entire worldwide phenomenon of competitions grew out of these two incredibly smart but simple uses of an old peripheral.

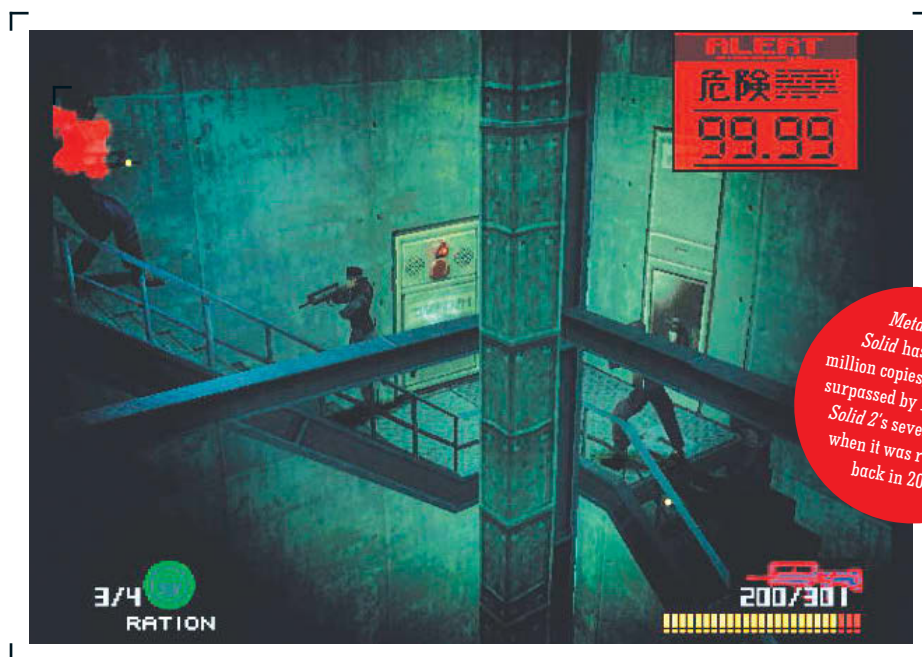
It could be argued that the series has become ruthlessly complicated in recent years, piling on more characters in a way that doesn't really add to the quality of the product, even as the realisation of the settings and creatures has become so much richer. Any kid who wants to catch 'em all these days needs a bottomless pit of time and overly generous parents to accumulate all the necessary titles – that seems counter to the binary simplicity of what *Red* and *Blue* originally represented. You and your friends, separately invested in your own adventures, collected Pokémon to your obsessive satisfaction. Then, on the most unlikely of formats, you brought your two adventures together to complete that experience. A deserved cultural phenomenon was born out of it.

The effect Pokémon had on the gaming landscape went far beyond the boundaries of its own success, however. Nintendo had stealthily introduced millions of players to the previously niche RPG genre, on an even bigger scale than *Final Fantasy VII* did in 1997, using its colourful setting and characters as a Trojan horse for what is undoubtedly fantastic and complex, stat-driven combat design. While visually speaking, *Pokémon Red*, *Blue* and *Yellow* were made to appeal to children, the actual meat of the experience was mature enough to give it a multi-generational appeal. *X & Y*'s release this year on 3DS only underlines that status – this franchise will live on forever, and rightfully so.

GAME CHANGERS

METAL GEAR SOLID

Released: 1998 (Japan, US), 1999 (UK) Publisher: Konami
Developer: KCEJ System: PlayStation



Kojima created the modern stealth genre with this influential cyber thriller, as well as introducing the iconic Solid Snake to audiences worldwide...

KOJIMA'S 3D TRANSLATION of his MSX *Metal Gear* series was a landmark game due to its details and depth. You can see this in the way it was initially promoted during E3 1997: displays of Snake blowing up guards with about 20 consecutive C4 bombs, figuring out snowy land masses through the scope and machine-gunning an invisible cyborg ninja while office debris flies through the air. It's this extra dimension to design that makes *Metal Gear Solid* such a significant part of the history of our medium – this was the birth of the modern stealth genre in all its details, all its possibilities in approaching situations however you liked.

For many players, *Metal Gear Solid* was a shock to the system in that Snake's shooting and basic action abilities were just alternative paths in the game – instead, sneaking around was the point. Stealth is something players had to mentally adjust to. That first scenario, when Snake is waiting for the elevator after crawling out of the water, is a brilliantly disguised tutorial. Approach it with open fists and you realise that enemies don't die after they're knocked over. You have no guns, and once the alarm goes off, that's pretty much it for you.

Then you learn to be quiet. You learn how to choke enemies without accidentally throwing them with the square button, you learn not to tread through the water on your way past guards and, crucially, you learn to wait. And, once you've grasped these fundamentals, you get good at everything else in *Metal Gear Solid*, too, including the combat. Understanding how to use everything in Snake's inventory, like the scope, claymore mines and rations enables you to look at every environment laterally, like a puzzle with many solutions, and be rewarded by the intricacy of the way you tackle the situation.

It's still arguably Kojima's most engaging piece of work, on a par with *MGS3* and far outstripping *Sons Of Liberty* as well as, to a lesser extent, *Guns Of The Patriots*. Each *Metal Gear Solid* game is an escalating journey from A to B, fraught with the madness of a gauntlet of boss fights along the way, increasingly bizarre environments and the promise of an unpredictable climax. *Metal Gear's* boss fights are the best in the field, frankly. In *MGS*, Kojima took the time to underline the menace of each one.

They all have their own angle on insanity; Revolver Ocelot opts for a gun duel in a close-quarters C4

THE STORY OF MGS: IN BRIEF

WE ENDEAVOUR TO SUM UP KOJIMA'S SELF-DESTRUCTING NARRATIVE IN ONE BOXOUT



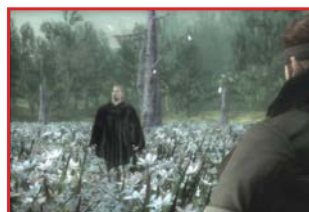
METAL GEAR SOLID

★ Big Boss clone Solid Snake is dispatched onto Shadow Moses to stop Liquid, who's holding America hostage with nuclear arms. Snake tries to rescue people from Liquid's FOXHOUND unit but they die. Snake eliminates FOXHOUND one-by-one, saves Meryl and Otacon, destroys the robot Metal Gear then beats Liquid.



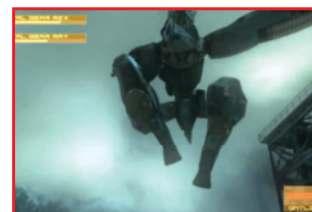
METAL GEAR SOLID 2

★ Snake finds out that the US military has built a Metal Gear, which Ocelot steals. Time jumps forward, and Raiden is looking to stop Solidus Snake, who it's later revealed raised him. It turns out the game has been an attempt by the Patriots to recreate the circumstances of Shadow Moses with Raiden in place of Snake.



METAL GEAR SOLID 3

★ It's the Sixties, and Big Boss (Naked Snake) is dispatched to rescue a scientist. His mentor, The Boss, betrays him and defects to the Soviet Union. Snake is sent to terminate her, before the truth about the manipulation of The Boss and betrayal by love interest EVA lead to the greatest videogame ending of all time.



METAL GEAR SOLID 4

★ Snake is old. The world is the subject of a war economy manipulated by Liquid Ocelot and presided over by the Patriots, who are an AI created by MGS3's Zero. Raiden is a robot ninja. Big Boss turns up. Meryl marries Johnny Sasaki. Raiden's child is the Milkyboy Kid. The ending is too long. Snake wins and has an iPod.

trap, Psycho Mantis infiltrates the mind of love interest Meryl and puts a gun against her head to manipulate Snake, Gray Fox brutally murders soldiers at random, Vulcan Raven cruises around in a tank and Sniper Wolf spends entire days picking out her targets. Then there's the main villain: Liquid Snake. A clone of Big Boss like Solid Snake himself and therefore his genetic equal, despite having an inexplicable bizarre British-American accent and a blonde mullet. They're innovative in appearance, thanks to Yoji Shinkawa's character designs, as well as grotesquely charismatic in their portrayal.

■■■ THEY'RE THE MAIN event in *Metal Gear Solid*, each framed with this mythical feeling of threat, like each comes preloaded with their own torrid histories that have shaped them into these chaotic figures. They all feel like they belong in Shadow Moses, this foreign-feeling icy kingdom of madness. It's become tiresomely popular to slate Hideo Kojima's use of cut-scenes, but the way bosses are presented in *MGS* is convincingly cinematic, right down to their names appearing on-screen with the actor's in brackets.

And that's the other component of *Metal Gear Solid*'s DNA, the one that is often knocked and rarely applauded when it's good: the influence of cinema.

IT'S STILL KOJIMA'S MOST ENGAGING PIECE OF WORK, ON A PAR WITH METAL GEAR SOLID 3

KEY FACTS

■ *Metal Gear Solid* topped the United Kingdom charts for eight weeks when it was originally released in 1999, which was a record at the time.

■ One of the only games in the series to get a PC port – and actually quite a good one – *Metal Gear* found its way to Windows in late 2000 and works on Windows 7, though it's not available on Steam or GOG.

■ *Metal Gear Solid* was remade as *The Twin Snakes* in 2003 by Silicon Knights, but the developer fluffed it a bit by changing the music and rerecording the voice acting. But it did look nice.

Yes, it's full of cutscenes, but the vast majority are good cutscenes, elevated by a fairly well-translated script and a superb voice cast who were far and above the industry standard at the climax of the CD-ROM age. The story was full of silly bits but there was conviction in the way it was presented, with David Hayter's dramatic gruff interpretation of Snake making him one of the first videogame characters to instantly be known on voice alone.

Just like the stealth mechanics, this cinematic presentation felt new to people. That Kojima handled it so well was expected after such a broad sweep of hype prior to the game's release, and the narrative became intrinsic to the reveal of whatever challenges the player would face next, including the aforementioned bosses. It was by no means the first title to achieve this (Westwood's *Blade Runner* was perhaps even more revolutionary with mo-cap in 1997), but for many of the six million gamers who hadn't seen videogames convincingly brush with motion pictures, this would be a watershed moment.

That's just one part of why *Metal Gear Solid* holds up today, in fact, much better than its flawed successor, bogged down as it is by adolescent conspiracy nonsense and a truncated narrative. The rebirth of the stealth genre prompted by *MGS*, a feat shared with *Thief: The Dark Project*, led to the rise (and eventual fall) of *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear*'s own progression in its third and fourth instalments, as well as the proliferation of this genre's mechanics in every game from *GTA* to *Tomb Raider*. Hideo Kojima, meanwhile, became one of the industry's leading lights and the kind of public figure where people would pay attention to absolutely everything he had to say. *Metal Gear Solid* is a worthy success story, a game that remains very easy to fall in love with.

GAME CHANGERS

FINAL FANTASY VII

Released: 1997 Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America/Europe
Developer: Square System: PlayStation



Cloud's somewhat ridiculous, utterly enormous Buster Sword was originally referred to as the 'Giant Kitchen Knife' by character designer Tetsuya Nomura.

Redefining the RPG as we know it and providing a watershed moment for gaming's ability to be emotional and mature, Final Fantasy VII was one of the most important games in the PlayStation's life

FINAL FANTASY VII, the first big blockbuster RPG in the West, had its roots with Nintendo – but in a history as winding as any *Final Fantasy* backstory, Squaresoft ended up releasing its game on the PlayStation thanks to the CD-ROM format (which offered more space than the cartridges Nintendo would stick with for the next few years).

Sony, keen to capitalise on Squaresoft's defection, sank an astounding \$100 million into the US marketing budget for the RPG, whipping up a furious consumer frenzy for the game. Mainstream TV commercials, sprawling billboards – it was uncharted ground for the RPG. Paired with an estimated development budget of \$45 million, both Sony and Squaresoft had a lot riding on the success of the title (which, as the first 3D *Final Fantasy* game, had a lot to prove).

With the game shipping worldwide, Squaresoft committed over 100 digital artists to the game, from both Japanese and American development teams, setting up a new studio in Hawaii to house the bulk of the Western staff (the location of which would go on to influence the tropical locations in *Final Fantasy X*). *Final Fantasy VII* introduced the genre to the big-

budget, cinematic FMV – something that has since become standard practice in the role-playing game; Yoshinori Kitase, director of the *Final Fantasy* series since *V*, always intended to be a film director until his career took him down the videogames route.

The hardware of the PlayStation allowed huge setpieces to be set up – allowing the player to involve themselves directly, pushing events on interactively before dropping in climactic cutscenes that served to punctuate the narrative while showcasing the art direction and visual fidelity of the game. The presentation of the pre-rendered backgrounds gave an almost voyeuristic look into the world, while many of the FMVs were intimate, street-level vignettes showing off the artistry Squaresoft was known for.

The infamous story beats *Final Fantasy VII* is defined by – the motorcycle chase through Midgar, Aeris' death, the encounter with Sephiroth in the flames – wouldn't have been as emotionally engaging without the rest of the world. *Final Fantasy VII* was one of the first console RPGs available to Westerners that actively encouraged player exploration, properly rewarding players for their

THE ANATOMY OF FINAL FANTASY VII

THE FAR-FLUNG
INFLUENCES FOR FFXVII



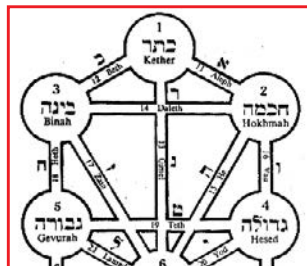
NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

★ In the Gold Saucer, there's a replica of Asuka Langley's D-Type armour on display in Dio's showroom. Both *Evangelion* and *Final Fantasy VII* contain religious parallels, and young protagonists being forced into world-defining events.



STAR WARS

★ Recurring *Final Fantasy* characters Biggs and Wedge got their first outing in *VII* (the translators finally getting the recurrent *Star Wars* reference) and the ragtag bunch of star-crossed protagonists faceoff against an evil empire (well, an evil corporation, at least).



KABBALAH

★ *Final Fantasy VII* contains allusions to Kabbalistic teachings; Sephiroth's full name (translated) is Sepher Sephiroth – a Hebrew translation of which reads 'Book of Numbers'. Some Kabbalistic teachings refer to a God emerging from dormancy into a state of sentient creation.



DEEP PURPLE

★ Bear with us. Listen to *Burn* by Deep Purple, then listen to the *Still More Fighting* track from the *Final Fantasy VII* OST. We'd chalk this one down to coincidence if Nobou Uematsu hadn't hired Deep Purple's Ian Gillan to provide vocals for *Blue Dragon* back in 2006.

efforts with bonus story content or practical loot: chocobo breeding, the secret 'Weapon' super-bosses and even two characters (Yuffie and Vincent) were completely optional. Compound that with character- and location-specific scenes that could only be triggered by having certain party members present, and you've got a world that isn't just complete, but seemingly alive – every facet of The Planet was deeply considered (perhaps the result of employing so many digital artists). RPGs had hidden elements in them before, but *Final Fantasy VII* elevated the prestige of completing these bonus missions and gave rewards for doing so – ultimate weapons, bonus cutscenes, special materia, hidden summons, all combined to push the player's completionist buttons, whilst simultaneously realising the history and atmosphere of the world.

■■■ The battle system implemented in the title also hit upon two delicate sweet spots. Accessible enough for the casual newcomer and familiar enough for the core gamer, battles in *VII* kept the Active-Time Battle introduced in *IV* – lacing each encounter with a dynamic immediacy – whilst also stripping away the class-based abilities the series had been built on. By introducing materia – crystallised planetary life-

KEY FACTS

■ The game sold an epic 2.3 million copies within its first three days of release in its native Japan. On American shores, the game sold 500,000 in three weeks – hitting 1,000,000 within three months.

■ The technology that powered the FMV sequences of *Final Fantasy VII* inspired the game's producer, Hironobu Sakaguchi, to begin production on the first CGI *Final Fantasy* film, *The Spirits Within*.

■ *Final Fantasy VII* is the best-selling instalment of the franchise, with over ten million units sold worldwide, inspiring several off-shoots and spin-offs.

force that gave characters access to abilities, skills and commands – *Final Fantasy VII* could forgo the limitations that certain 'jobs' imposed on characters in previous games: healers were no longer ignored until boss fights, tanks could cast spells, mages weren't one-hit kill glass cannons.

By weaving materia into the larger narrative, *Final Fantasy VII* could get away with something unique – killing off a central character. As a player, *Final Fantasy VII* made you feel powerful. It made you feel smart. The micromanagement with materia distribution, the party setups you could enact, the pace at which you chose to grind or explore – it all made you feel in control. Aeris' death, for many still a watershed moment in gaming, remains one of the most memorable points within the genre. It's now more common to see, but when it first happened, it stripped power away from the player in a very knowing and intentional way. The narrative conceit has since been analysed to exhaustion, and often labelled overrated, but *Final Fantasy VII* was the first to do this kind of player manipulation on such a scale and, like in any art-form, that counts for a lot.

There have been many contenders to *Final Fantasy VII*'s RPG throne, but few of them manage to combine all the elements the PlayStation's first *Final Fantasy* did. The world was built to make players feel involved, the FMVs were directed to imitate all the best bits of Nineties action movies, the characters were designed to make us understand them, the mechanics were designed to make us *want* to explore them... *Final Fantasy VII* was the sales high point of gaming on the PlayStation, and laid the foundations for one of the most devoutly followed genres in the industry, as well as solidifying *Final Fantasy*'s stalwart place in gaming history.

**SQUARESOFT
COMMITTED OVER
100 DIGITAL ARTISTS
TO THE GAME**

GAME CHANGERS HALF-LIFE 2

Released: 2004 Publisher: Valve System: PC



The physics in *Half-Life 2* are superb, and you will often use the environment to take down enemies. Fuel drums are a little more important than usual, then.

games™ takes a look at how Valve's revolutionary sequel to *Half-Life* helped shape the future of first-person shooters and helped to establish the studio as one of the best story-tellers in the industry

WHEN VALVE ANNOUNCED a sequel to its hit shooter *Half-Life* at E3 in May 2003, the gaming world predictably went nuts. In addition to impressing with an amazing new game engine called Source, Valve was revealing a sequel to one of the most important first-person shooters of all time. Expectations seemed to be impossibly high, but once Valve's magnum opus was released some 18 months later, it not only met the lofty hopes of gamers everywhere, but smashed them with yet another landmark videogame.

Valve had once again set a new standard for the popular genre, a standard which is still being felt in today's games. *BioShock Infinite*, *Homefront*, *Resistance 3* and *Dishonored* are just a few of the titles to share DNA with Valve's impressive sequel, and developers continue to cite *Half-Life 2* and its own groundbreaking predecessor as essential when it comes to implementing narrative into games. This stylish storytelling technique is rampant in *Half-Life 2*,

and has done so well that it's not even necessary to have played the original game. Subtle narration fills you in on all the key points of the original, so a player can be as disorientated as protagonist Gordon Freeman when he first makes his appearance and still know what's going on.

Some might say that Valve had it easy because it was essentially building on the groundwork it had laid down with the excellent *Half-Life*. That's not really fair, however. Valve isn't the sort of company to rest on its laurels, and it pushed every aspect of the original game to deliver a title that, nearly a decade on, still manages to enthrall those who play it.

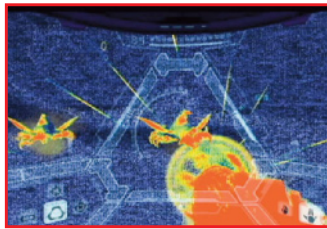
This in part is down to the Source engine itself, a highly polished piece of coding that's still heavily in use today. There's a cleanliness and slickness to Valve's engine that is consistently impressive, regardless of how it has to scale. Valve even managed a perfectly solid port on the original Xbox, admittedly with lengthy loading times and an

HALF-LIFE 2: BEFORE AND AFTER | THE GAMES THAT SHARE DNA WITH VALVE'S HIT GAME



HALF-LIFE

★ Valve's industry-defining shoot-'em-up was a world away from the likes of *Doom* and *Quake*, providing gamers with more than just enemies to shoot at. It introduced many key game mechanics to the genre and proved you didn't need expansive cut-scenes to tell an incredibly polished story.



METROID PRIME

★ Although *Metroid Prime* has plenty of guns in it, like *Half-Life 2* it was anything but a conventional shooter. Its greatest achievement was converting the 2D essence of the *Metroid* series to the third dimension, but its beautifully detailed environments are what really link it to Valve's shooter.



F.E.A.R.

★ Like *Half-Life 2*, Monolith's *F.E.A.R.* proved that it was possible to make survival-based horror and wrap it around a first-person shooter. It takes the concept further than Valve did, but remembers that it's atmosphere and not just gory shocks that should drive a story forward.



BIOSHOCK INFINITE

★ *BioShock* builds on both *Half-Life 2* and the likes of *System Shock 2* by delivering believable characters and an achingly gorgeous world. It's arguably one of the greatest modern day examples of story narration, and features brilliant AI in the form of Elizabeth, the girl you have to rescue.

occasionally erratic frame rate. Revisit *Half-Life 2* today, and it remains a spectacularly good-looking game, and while its textures might not be as detailed as more recent games (there's nearly a decade's gulf in technology after all), it's surprising how good it still looks. It's most notable in the lighting (which was substantially improved in *Half-Life 2's* two episodic sequels) and the many characters you meet, including Alyx; one of the most realistic and believable characters we've ever encountered in a videogame.

■■■■ THE MOST STUNNING aspect of *Half-Life 2*, however, is how realistic everything felt. This in part was due to the dynamic lighting, but the environments were also stunning pieces of work that felt utterly believable as you explored them. There are no pointless dead ends in *Half-Life 2*, invisible walls are largely absent (Valve simply blocks off areas it doesn't want you to go with suitable objects) and every building you go into appears to have a distinct purpose. Every single inch of the game world, styled on a dystopian Eastern Europe, feels completely real as if it's a place from a long forgotten time that members of Valve has visited. It's alien but also recognisable, and you can't help but want to explore every bit of it. Exploring does highlight

HALF-LIFE 2 IS AS MUCH ABOUT THE ADVENTURE AS SHOOTING ENEMIES

KEY FACTS

■ *Half-Life 2* was built using Valve's Source Engine. The adaptable engine made its debut with *Counter-Strike: Source* and has been used in every Valve game since.

■ Alyx Vance is voiced by Merle Dandridge, a theatre performer in *Spamalot* and *Rent*. If her voice sounds familiar you've probably heard it in the excellent *The Last Of Us* as Marlene.

■ Valve was involved in a legal battle with Vivendi Universal over the distribution rights of *Half-Life 2* in cyber cafes. A settlement was agreed with Vivendi losing the right to distribute Valve's games.

the fact that *Half-Life 2* is actually very linear, but as with the best games, it cleverly tricks you into thinking the opposite, and that you're instead inside an epic believable world and not just traipsing down predetermined corridors.

This bait and switch continues with the excellent gameplay, which continues to play with conventions. On the surface it appears to be a straightforward first-person shooter, but in reality it's so much more. Like its predecessor, *Half-Life 2* is as much about the adventure as it is about shooting down enemies, and while it has a variety of satisfying weaponry (most notably the game-changing Gravity Gun), they should be seen more as tools designed to deal with each new challenge that Valve throws at you. Most enemies can be dealt with in a number of different ways, and you'll often find yourself experimenting and discovering new methods of dealing with past locations you've visited before.

Puzzles are also rife in *Half-Life 2*, and really come to the fore once you've acquired the aforementioned Gravity Gun. They're not as elaborate as those promised in the E3 video, but you'll still find yourself scratching your head. You'll also marvel at just how much variety can be found, especially when it starts straying into other genres (driving, survival horror, squad-based shooting) and pulls them off with little effort. *Half-Life 2* may have been a relatively rough ride for Valve during development (at one point the FBI was called in after parts of the source code were leaked), but you'd never tell from the final product. It's as finely crafted a videogame that you'll ever come across, and deserves every piece of acclaim it has received. When the G-Man states during the E3 reveal that "We've been rather busy in your absence, Mr Freeman," he certainly wasn't lying.

GAME CHANGERS

HALF-LIFE 2: DEFINING MOMENTS

■ VALVE'S SCI-FI SEQUEL REMAINS AN ASTONISHING GAME NEARLY A DECADE AFTER ITS RELEASE. WE REVEAL THE MOMENTS THAT WILL STAY WITH YOU FOREVER



ALYX

■ *BIOSHOCK INFINITE*'S ELIZABETH may be the new benchmark for AI in videogames, but Alyx beat her to the punch by a good nine years. Cleverly scripted and surprisingly realistic, you genuinely miss the moments when she's not around, and the adventure always picks up when she's there. The touching moments she has with Dog and father are genuinely charming, while her intelligence and well-animated expressions set her a world apart from the portrayal of women in other videogames.



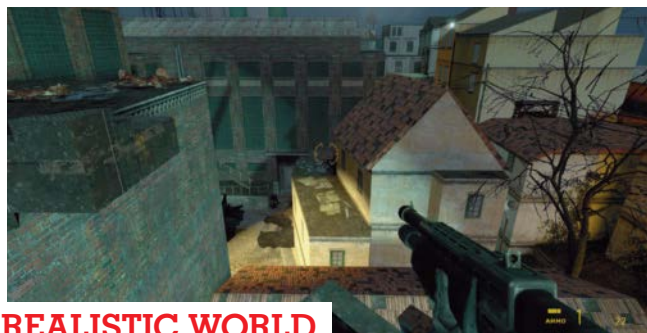
THE CHOPPER

■ EARLY ON IN *Half-Life 2* you're attacked by a persistent Hunter-Chopper. It follows you across several stages, causing you to scramble to safety whenever you're in an open space, or simply go underground to avoid it. Valve occasionally allows you to have a breather, but it always brings the huge gunship back at the most inopportune moments. It's not until you gain access to a gun-mounted hovercraft that you finally have the means to take the damned thing down, making its final demise that much sweeter.



RAVENHOLM

■ EVERY ASPECT OF Ravenholm is superb, with Valve distilling the entire survival horror genre into two of the tightest gaming hours you'll ever experience. Highlights include using buzz saws to decapitate zombies or crushing them with elaborate traps. Its highlight, however, is arguably your last final desperate race across the city's roofs and its ominous graveyard. Fast zombies surround you from all sides, with only the rattling of nearby drainpipes giving you any indication of where they will attack next.



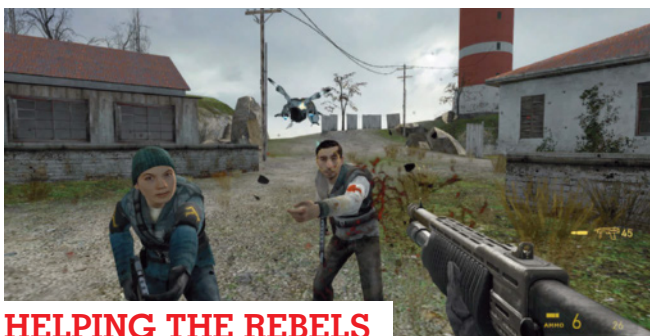
REALISTIC WORLD

■ ONE OF THE greatest aspects of *Half-Life 2* is just how real everything feels. Characters appear to be going about their daily lives, helping to further paint the grim world that Valve has created, while conveniently filling you in with important information. You'll often discover neat little scenarios like friends holding each other or treating the wounded that you'd otherwise miss, as it's all subtly taking place in the background. It's amazingly effective, and adds a further layer of believability to the world.



THE BRIDGE

■ ONE OF *HALF-LIFE 2*'S tensest moments comes when you need to cross a derelict bridge. The sense of vertigo as you scramble along the loose struts is immense, and you'll need a good eye in order to find the best way across the maze of metal. Halfway across you get attacked, putting you in a frantic gunfight with nowhere to hide and an immense drop beneath you. Things get even harder once you've reached your destination, as you have to make your way back with a Combine Gunship hot on your tail.



HELPING THE REBELS

■ AS YOU'RE TRAVELLING along Highway 17 you encounter a small pocket of resistance fighters expecting incoming forces. Upon gaining access to a rocket launcher you're attacked by gunships and bedlam erupts. It's the first real showcase of not only the enemy AI, but your rebel compatriots. As you do your best to take down the gunship, your AI helpers will point out when your weapon needs reloading and even hand over ammo. It's an excellent sequence that adds further realism to the game world.



TURNING THE TABLES

■ AS *HALF-LIFE 2*'S ending draws near, you're required to assault a heavily armed prison. Enemies are everywhere, and the whole level seems to be a suicide mission. It's fortunate, then, that you've access to a new weapon that allows you to control the Antlions. After being punished by the insectoid foes in the previous levels it's gratifying to set them loose against your enemies. Similar squad tactics are used later on with rebels, but they don't feel quite as effective as they do in your first encounter.



THE GRAVITY GUN

■ QUITE POSSIBLY ONE of the finest weapons in videogaming, it's rather telling that the only thing that's impressed us since is Valve's own Portal Gun. You pick this up early in your adventure, and it changes your approach to the rest of the game dramatically. Levels suddenly become puzzles, as the gun lets you manipulate objects and work out inventive ways of clearing obstacles. It's even better during the final stage as, infused with Dark Energy, you pick up enemy soldiers and throw them about like rag dolls.



HIGHER GROUND

■ AS YOU APPROACH Highway 17's beach you encounter deadly Antlions that are kept at bay by machines that send vibrations through the earth. The safety of those machines is soon left behind though, and you're forced to negotiate treacherous terrain where dropping to the floor immediately causes the Antlions to attack. The tension soon racks up as you make your way across rocks and broken debris, using your gravity gun to clear large stretches of ground. It's easily one of the tensest moments in the game.



STRIDER ATTACK

■ STRIDERS ARE HUGE tripod robots that require immense firepower to take down. Without a rocket launcher you're usually outmatched, so you'll often have to hide from them. While there are several battles where you get to take them down, by far the best moment to feature the metallic monstrosities is when you find yourself in an underground tunnel having giving one the slip. As you make your way forwards you hear a crashing from behind, only to realise that the beast has broken through the ceiling.

GAME CHANGERS TOMB RAIDER

Released: 25 October 1996 Publisher: Eidos Interactive Developer: Core Design
System: PlayStation, PC, Sega Saturn



Tomb Raider actually had locations inspired by real history – Vilcabamba (pictured), for example, was the last stronghold of the Incas before the Spanish invaded in 1572.

Released back in 1996, *Tomb Raider* unleashed Lara Croft on the world – who would become more than just a protagonist, but a legitimate celebrity

CAST YOUR MIND BACK TO 1996 – in the world of gaming, 3D was new. It was unknown ground and a lot of console developers were still testing the waters. Moving away from the pre-rendered backgrounds and the isometric views of the early PSOne games, *Tomb Raider* was arguably the first action-adventure game to do 3D properly. The original instalment of *Tomb Raider* hit a laser-focused sweet spot in the blooming Nineties games industry – it presented a good, well-made, innovative game, while simultaneously appealing directly to the teen and young adult market. *Tomb Raider* observed what *Super Mario 64* was doing with 3D platforming, and took the genre to PlayStation's gamers – a move, it would turn out – that would cement *Tomb Raider* and Lara Croft's place in gaming history forever.

Tomb Raider's release came six months after *Super Mario 64*; a game that was, for a lot of people, perfect. It introduced watertight 3D mechanics and presented them in a familiar and accessible way. *Tomb Raider* went the exact opposite direction, appealing to the PlayStation's more hardcore audience. Rather than applying to the cutesy, family-friendly template *Mario* had set out, *Tomb Raider* focused on violence

and exploration – taking its cues from the myriad action-adventure films that popularised Hollywood during the early Nineties. *Tomb Raider* was an archaeological fantasy – a benchmark game in the evolution of action platforming and woven deeply into the DNA of the likes of *Uncharted*, the recent *Prince Of Persia* games and even more action-orientated affairs like *InFamous*. Lara moved incredibly well for a character designed in 1996; her acrobatics were expertly designed and everything always felt natural – flipping, jumping, side-stepping, scaling walls: it was all a pleasure to do. Supported by clear visual language – you always knew where to climb, what to grab on to or how far to jump – *Tomb Raider* truly brought platforming into a safe 3D realm.

The structure of the game was simple – explore this, solve this puzzle, fight these enemies. Rinse, repeat. But therein lay the game's success – it didn't overcomplicate things, it didn't push its core mechanics too far. The game introduced you to a few abilities and created puzzles in which every ability was fully explored. *Tomb Raider* had a sense of skill progression that made the player feel smart for manipulating, even though it was mostly scripted

THE ANATOMY OF TOMB RAIDER | WHAT INSPIRED CORE DESIGN TO CREATE LARA IN THE FIRST PLACE?



THE CITY OF DERBY

★ Core Design's offices in the Midlands city of Derby actually played a big part in forming the basis for the design of Croft Manor – one of the most iconic places players come across in any *Tomb Raider* game. The city of Derby honoured Lara's legacy by renaming one of their main roads 'Lara Croft Way'.



INDIANA JONES

★ Surprising exactly no-one, Lara was originally developed to be similar to a female Indy – even her name bore the same roots, starting out as Laura Cruz. As Core Design began fleshing Laura's character out more, they decided she needed to be more English – specifically 'a proper English lady'.



ACCIDENTAL BREASTS

★ Lara's (in)famous bosom was the result of a modelling accident: when playing with Lara's model, designer Toby Gard accidentally moved the bosom measurements up to 150 per cent of the placeholder size. The other designers saw the alteration and encouraged Gard to keep it – the entire six-man team 'loved it'.



INTERNATIONAL MYTHOLOGY

★ By having Lara spelunk her way through caves and tombs around the world, Core had the licence to include all manner of legendary beasts, from Greek to Egyptian. By tapping into more questionable parts of ancient history (re: Atlantis), Core could also handily *invent* mythologies to throw into the mix.

– the illusion of this much control made everyone playing the game feel brilliant for solving this fiendish puzzle or taking out this ridiculous enemy.

Tomb Raider's other strength laid in its ambitious environments – looking back now, the textures and blocky objects seem amateurish, but at the time, the visuals were breaking new ground. From the claustrophobic confines of stone corridors and cave routes to grand, expansive halls forgotten for millennia, each location seemed relevant and logical – the world building in the game was masterful.

■■■ The considered architectural approach to building the game sat alongside smooth animations, impressive loading speeds and movement, advanced lighting and application of colour – all these elements combined to produce a game that was not just pleasant to look at, but was technically sophisticated. Compared to the low resolutions and primary colours of *Mario*, *Tomb Raider* was a visual masterpiece.

The game's treatment of Lara as its protagonist was both groundbreaking and controversial – Lara was the first female action hero the games industry

KEY FACTS

■ *Tomb Raider* turned the fortunes of Eidos around – the year before the game's release, Eidos suffered a \$2.6 million loss. After *Tomb Raider*, profits soared to \$14.5 million.

■ There was never a cheat code on console games to unlock 'nude Lara' – but there was a patch for PC that applied the naked skin to Lara's model. Eidos sent out a cease and desist to all sites hosting the patch.

■ The game was originally developed on Sega Saturn development kits, but *Tomb Raider* would eventually find success on PlayStation, and the first instalment was the only Saturn game in the series.

had seen and, while the original itself took care to treat her job as a protagonist seriously, her sexualised appearance and infamous proportions were also clearly marketing tools (albeit ridiculously successful ones). Lara straddled an uncanny middle ground: she was daring, inspirational and ferocious, but she also ran around the jungle in hotpants and a low-cut top. Lara's physical presence caught the attention of Timberland and Lucozade – whether she liked it or not, she was pushing gaming into mainstream media in ways the previous gaming mascots never could. Lara wasn't for children; she was an advert for adult gaming, something the console market hadn't had the luxury of showing off before.

Lara's character was always admirably set up, though; where Eidos could have thrown Lara at you and said 'Look: sexy action lady!' it didn't, for the most part, opting instead to humanise Lara in a realistic and emphatic way. Lara was an upper-class millionaire, living in the lap of luxury and knowing little of struggle. When her plane crashes on her return from a skiing trip, Lara becomes a survivalist – her return to civilisation bores her, so she sets out to globetrot, seeking treasure and excitement.

Chances are, back in 1996, you'd never been plonked in the middle of a jungle and been given the simple 'Survive!' goal before. You and Lara were going through these learning curves at the same time – and that narrative conceit made you associate more with her situation, bringing you into the game more. Lara was a determined lady, out for herself, out for plunder and glory. She was Nathan Drake before Nathan Drake – the Indiana Jones of videogames, both in terms of legacy and iconic status. And that, more than anything, is why Lara remains so strongly rooted in gaming's collective consciousness.

THE GAME'S TREATMENT OF LARA AS ITS PROTAGONIST WAS GROUNDBREAKING AND CONTROVERSIAL

GAME CHANGERS

SOULCALIBUR

Released: 1999 Publisher: Namco Developer: Namco System: Arcade, Dreamcast



Although 3D fighting games allowed players to side-step or roll, the 8-Way Run mechanic was the first time sustained movement was allowed in or out of the screen.

SoulCalibur was the second game in the Souls franchise but the first to introduce the 8-Way Run mechanic, innovating the 3D fighting game genre

■ ■ ■ AFTER RELEASING *SOUL Edge* – the first game in the *Souls* franchise – Namco was keen to listen to the feedback from hardcore fans that emptied their wallets into the various arcade machines attracting fighters around the world. The developer completely deconstructed the game and started to build it again from the ground up, working closely with the *Tekken* development team to craft a fighting game that focused much more on the nuances of animation and speed than its peers, yet still retained the technical complexity that the slower games had come to master.

These changes were so significant that Namco decided to change the name of the game – *Soul Edge 2* would have insinuated more of the same, just a little more jazzed up – and so the now iconic *SoulCalibur* was born. The team at Namco responsible for the arcade release of the game consisted of about 60 staff, reduced to 40 for the Dreamcast port after the initial version had shipped.

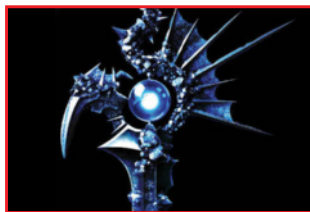
It was the port the remaining 40 staff obsessed over that began to define the game – as a launch title for the Dreamcast (in Europe and America, at least), the game was the first arcade port to really highlight

the difference between home-console releases and their cabinet-housed predecessors. *SoulCalibur* on the Dreamcast included a single-player campaign (which, until then, had been quite rare within the fighting game genre) and upgraded all of the game's stages to take advantage of the console's processor, rendering them in full 3D rather than the static 2D backgrounds players were used to seeing in the earlier release. The result was a game that felt completely different to its arcade counterpart, setting a trend for the other fighting games (both 2D and 3D) that were releasing around the same time.

■ ■ ■ *SoulCalibur* is largely famous for its seminal 8-Way Run feature – a movement mechanic that took full advantage of the game's 3D nature. 3D fighters had existed within the fighting genre before – *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* being the most notable – but it was the introduction of the 8-Way Run that really opened up the genre. *SoulCalibur* (and *Soul Edge* before it) were the only games – aside from the ill-fated *Battle Arena Toshinden* – that implemented weapons into their battle systems. Namco wanted to keep the weapons a central crux of the game for *SoulCalibur*,

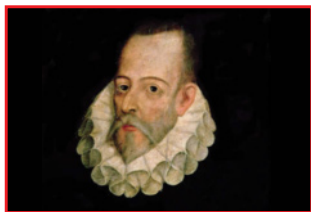
MAKING HISTORY

SOULCALIBUR ACTUALLY DRAWS A FAIR AMOUNT FROM HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY... AND BRUCE LEE



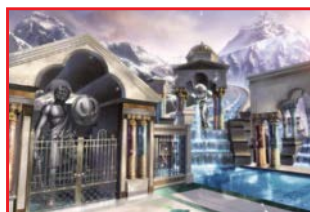
KING ARTHUR'S EXCALIBUR

★ The actual name of the *Soul Calibur* weapon is taken, in part, from the central sword of the Arthurian legend. As it turns out, both of these swords share rather similar traits: they are both holy weapons designed to vanquish evil and are wielded by brave paladins on quests of vengeance.



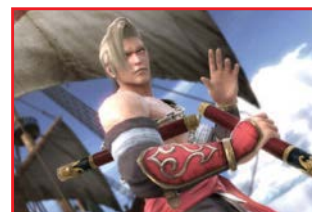
THE WORKS OF MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

★ Ghostly pirate and gunblade-user Cervantes is loosely based on the Spanish novelist of the same name. It's rumoured that Cervantes (in-game) is taken from the impressions left by the titular hero Don Quixote – the self-deceptive and doomed hero of Cervantes' first novel.



GREEK GODS

★ There's a strong basis in Greek mythology surrounding central character Sophitia, her sister Cassandra and – later – Pyrrha and Patrokolos. All of them are Holy-aligned, inspired by Greek god of the Forge and Fire, Hephaestus, who wants to destroy Soul Edge because, simply, he didn't make it. Ego of the Gods, eh?



BRUCE LEE

★ Maxi – a wandering pirate trained in the arts of nunchaku – is another in a long line of fighting game characters that has been not just inspired by but actually based on the famous Chinese movie star; fitting in line with *Tekken's* Law, *Mortal Kombat's* Liu Kang, *Street Fighter's* Fei Long and *Dead Or Alive's* Jann Lee.

so the 'Weapon Break' of *Soul Edge* was taken out. The combination of permanent weapon combat and the 8-Way Run made *SoulCalibur* one of the most tactile games on the market; the ability to position yourself at will around your opponent went hand-in-hand with extended reach and varied movepool weapons allowed to each character.

By having each character fight with different types of weapon, Namco also opened up a whole realm of possibilities for interesting and diverse move-set designs. From the bushido-inspired sheathing and drawing attacks of Mitsurugi to Ivy's enchanted and alchemical whip-sword, *SoulCalibur* afforded itself freedom to include characters that other franchises could only dream about. This means that where games such as *Tekken* or *Street Fighter* or *King Of Fighters* would see palette-swapped characters or perhaps an overlap in moveset, *SoulCalibur* stood alone as being the only fighter game with a truly unique cast of characters.

Myriad fighters with myriad fighting styles meant there was more of a focus on defence in *SoulCalibur* than in other fighters, too. The jump mechanic from

KEY FACTS

■ The 8-Way Run system came from a Namco demo that featured a character running free through a field. The *Soul* devs used it and found it made a perfect marriage with weapon-based combat.

■ *SoulCalibur* is the only *Soul* game not to appear on a PlayStation system of any kind.

■ Across all the series' entries, the game has sold over 13 million units.

■ Many critics cite *SoulCalibur* as the most important game on the Dreamcast – toting it as a system seller due to how it showed off the graphical capabilities of the hardware.

Soul Edge was nerfed for *SoulCalibur*, becoming little more than a hop, so defensive play became less about evasion and more about the active block that was mapped to one of the face buttons – a curio in fighting games of the time. Having to actively choose when to block rendered you stationary, your only defensive flexibility coming from the Guard Impact mechanic – a staggering parry that could be triggered by pressing guard/forward. Having a longer window to pull off your Impacts moved the *Soul* series away from the rock-paper-scissors paradigm that *Edge* set up and made the whole fighting system seem much more rhythmic and balanced.

■■■ The medieval fantasy setting of the game was also in contrast to *SoulCalibur's* more modern peers. Moving between feudal Japan, the imposing castles of Germany, Indian docks and Caribbean caves – all rendered in 3D – allowed the game's diverse roster a fitting variety of locales. With the single-player campaign hashing out the foundations of a sprawling narrative that would live for six more games and two spin-offs (and counting), *SoulCalibur's* console release proved that there was a huge market for fighting games on the home console, and established Namco as the leading force in 3D fighters for generations to come.



NAMCO OPENED UP A WHOLE REALM OF POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERESTING AND DIVERSE MOVE-SET DESIGNS

GAME CHANGERS

GOLDENEYE 007

Released: 1997 Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Rare System: Nintendo 64



More than just a movie tie-in, Rare's seminal first-person shooter rewrote the genre playbook and provided Nintendo's console with a multiplayer classic

ARRIVING DURING THE golden age of first-person shooters, Rare's *GoldenEye 007* stood out from the overcrowded PC scene, landing on Nintendo's doorstep in 1997 on a wave of critical hype and acclaim. Until this point, many dismissed console platforms as unsuited to first-person shooters, instead sitting behind their PCs engrossed in *Doom*, *Quake* and *Wolfenstein*. *GoldenEye* arrived with an appropriate bang, highlighting consoles as a viable FPS platform for the first time and contributing significantly to the Nintendo 64's appeal.

With Martin Hollis in the director's chair, the game was moulded by the same prolific collective that would be responsible for *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* further down the line. Rare was hitting heights that many developers would only dream of, and generated some of the best output of the Nineties. Members of the same team would later form Free Radical, responsible for the equally excellent *TimeSplitters* series.

From the more sedate beginnings of the Dam level right through to the dramatic conclusion atop a large satellite array, *GoldenEye* took you on a monumental journey, fighting your way through Soviet control

centres, the streets of St Petersburg, the jungles of Cuba and what looks strangely like a reclamation site. The world that Rare built was a potent influence on first-person shooters that followed, and represented the first mainstream FPS with a truly international feel.

■ ■ ■ The film, released two years earlier, obviously influenced the game's design. Hollis and his team – thanks to the 64-bit power of Nintendo's machine – managed to achieve high levels of fidelity compared to the bog-standard output of the big movie licensing boom of the Eighties. Never before had there been a licensed game based on a movie that looked so much like its counterpart, and there haven't been many since then that have been as successful creatively or mechanically. Rare had access to set plans while developing, and due to this you can enjoy direct parallels with the film. It is still a joy to this day to jump from the dam at the end of the first level, for example – If you know the film, you'll be aware that it begins with Bond running and then performing the iconic bungee jump. In the game, however, there is an entire Russian compound that must be infiltrated

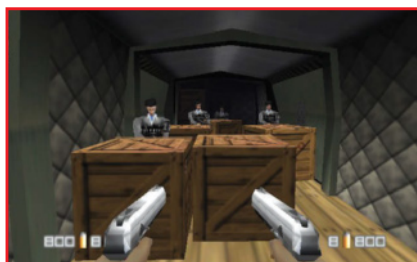
FOR ENGLAND, JAMES

GOLDENEYE OFFERED A DEEPER EXPERIENCE THAN MANY OF ITS PC COMPETITORS WITH THESE ELEMENTS



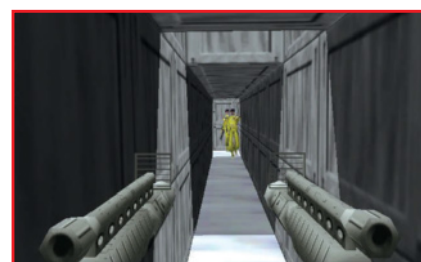
IMAGINATION

★ Martin Hollis and his team used the movie as a strong basis for the action in the game, but were unafraid to extend and adapt certain sections to enhance the experience. From being able to drop down into the bathroom in Facility to fighting Jaws in an Aztec temple, *GoldenEye* offers a refreshing take on movie adaptations.



LEVEL DESIGN

★ Ask anyone who played *GoldenEye* back in 1997 where the hidden body armour is in Cradle or where the RC-P90 is in Train, and they'll be able to tell you in a heartbeat. Rare's levels are diverse and memorable, borrowing directly from the film and expanding neatly on locations that the film brushed over.



WEAPONRY

★ Even now in the midst of the largest FPS movement in history thanks to *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*, *GoldenEye*'s array of weapons still stands out. This is no more apparent than when the 'All Guns' cheat is enabled, which not only provides you with every variety of firearm available naturally, but extras like a nifty taser.

before then. It almost gives the sense that the film begins in medias res – that by playing the game you're actually seeing the whole picture.

This is true with later levels too, thrusting Bond (impressively rendered to resemble Pierce Brosnan) into scenarios that were either only touched upon in the movie or entirely built for purpose. There are encounters in the Severnaya computer complex that Bond never visits in the movie, instead watching the facility be destroyed by an EMP blast from the *GoldenEye* satellite. And after protecting Natalya in Trevelyan's control centre towards the end of the game, you pursue the former 006 through some labyrinthine water caverns before eventually encountering him on top of the satellite array, in contrast to the film's simple jaunt in an elevator.

This willingness to adapt culminates in two secret levels that can be accessed after you've completed the game on Secret Agent and 00 Agent difficulties respectively. These levels – Aztec and Temple – showed a wider knowledge of James Bond, pitting Bond against two old nemeses in the form of Jaws and Baron Samedi. The Golden Gun makes an

KEY FACTS

■ *GoldenEye* was initially intended to be an on-rails shooter in the same vein as *Virtua Cop* and *Time Crisis*, but thankfully this was reconsidered.

■ Several levels were designed with the film sets in mind. The best examples of these can be found at the end of the Dam level, the bathroom and bottling room in Facility, the interrogation and library areas of Archives, and the Cradle level where you fight Trevelyan.

■ It is actually possible to control the game using two controllers at once, allowing for first-person control similar to that which you would find nowadays.

appearance. The temple is based on *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Aztec is actually Hugo Drax's jungle base from *Moonraker*. It shows a true love for Bond that few games have ever managed, allowing the more fantastical and tongue-in-cheek elements of the franchise to creep in from time to time.

■■■ By adding non-linear objectives, Rare further broke the first-person shooter mould, tasking you with approaching levels in a more considered manner on higher difficulties. On Agent difficulty these objectives are fairly basic, but on Secret Agent and 00 Agent it became quite testing. What's interesting is the lack of hand holding – certain objectives are either hidden away or more technical in nature, requiring a higher level of care than *GoldenEye*'s FPS forbears.

It all purveys production values that weren't really found in first-person shooters at this time, and that's where you can easily connect the dots between *GoldenEye* and modern shooters like *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*. Protecting Natalya in the control room, pursuing Trevelyan in the Cradle level, rescuing hostages on board the frigate – these elements were unexpected from a licensed game in 1997, and are common tropes of the genre today.

But *GoldenEye*'s legacy isn't just found in contemporary first-person shooters; it represents an industry shift. Would we have such a huge FPS player base today if it wasn't for Rare's masterpiece? Probably, yes, but it's likely that it would have taken longer to catch on. It also arguably represents the pinnacle of movie licensing. *GoldenEye* is still prevalent in the hearts and minds of many players today, and for that it is worthy of respect, reassessment and, of course, a playthrough if you get the chance.

**NEVER BEFORE
HAD THERE BEEN
A LICENSED GAME
THAT LOOKED SO
MUCH LIKE ITS
COUNTERPART**

GAME CHANGERS

GRAN TURISMO

Released: 1998 Publisher: Sony Developer: Polyphony System: PlayStation



In an era where arcade racers were king, Sony went down a different route and ushered in the dawn of true simulation racing games

EXITING THE PITLANE late in 1997, nobody could have predicted the impact that Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo* was going to have on the racing genre, not just on the then contemporary PSOne but also on Sony's follow-up consoles. A labour of love by Polyphony's visionary, Kazunori Yamauchi, *Gran Turismo* introduced virtual racers to a whole host of features rarely seen on console games before, producing an experience that still lingers long in the memory, thanks to both the original game's success and its pivotal role in creating the formula for later games in the series.

Beaten to the European market by Codemaster's exemplary *TOCA Touring Car Championship*, *Gran Turismo* was up against stiff competition on the starting grid, yet where *TOCA*'s graphics, fully-licensed championship, damage, and handling had wowed us in November 1997, *GT* suddenly changed the boundaries when it was released to European gamers in May 1998.

On first startup, the menu design seemed confusing and mildly uninspiring, yet these underwhelming emotions were quickly washed away when you realised the breadth of automotive exotica on offer to drive. Over 140 cars sat waiting for their turn with you behind the wheel, all officially licensed versions of their real-world counterparts. By today's standards it may sound rather lacking in variety, but before the turn of the millennium, never before had such choice been offered to motorsport enthusiasts.

If that ample selection of chariots wasn't enough though, *Gran Turismo* also introduced us to a range of performance upgrades. Exhausts, engine components, and tyres could all be modified to boost your cars' performance. What's more, aftermarket wheels from a range of real-life brands could be fitted, along with a small selection of Japanese tuner-style rear wings to help customise the look of your fleet, long before the *Need For Speed* franchise offered such extensive in-game services.

OFF FOR A SPIN | GRAN TURISMO SPAWNED ONE OF SONY'S BEST EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISES, WITH SUCCESS FROM THE SCREEN TO THE TRACK OVER THE LAST 17 YEARS.



TOP OF THE POPS

★ Every generation of Sony console has seen two *Gran Turismo* releases, with *GT* through to *GT5* selling a combined 57,500,000 units. *GT3* has been the series' most successful title, with sales of 14,890,000 units on its way to becoming the PS2's second biggest selling game.



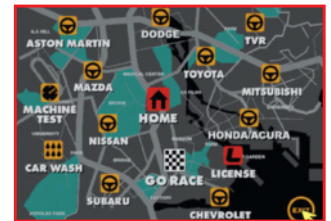
REAL RACING

★ The franchise has transcended the world of virtual racing with its *GT Academy* programme. Choosing the fastest racers from an online time trial, drivers are then pitted against one another in knockout rounds until a victor is picked. Winners have gone on to race at events like the 24 Hours of Le Mans.



WE'RE WAITING

★ As well as polished racing games, Polyphony Digital is notorious for making us wait to get behind the latest set of new wheels. From *Gran Turismo 2*'s delay of a few weeks due to coding issues, to the infuriating eight-month holdup before *Gran Turismo 5*'s launch, *GT* fans are a patient bunch.



DUDE WHERE'S MY...

★ Porsche? Not to be found in any *GT* games due to EA's recently ended monopoly on the 911 makers. However, the inclusion of German Porsche tuners, RUF, helped to cement the latter into the consciousness of the public. If you want official Stuttgart metal you'll have to head to *Forza* though...

Of course, all this cost money, and starting the game's main Simulation mode with just 10,000 credits meant that your first car was likely to be more suited to a Sunday run to the shops than a flat-out blast around one of the game's 11 fictional race tracks. Inevitably this meant that to find anything mildly impressive, we were sent searching the Used Car Lot. The cars on offer were regularly refreshed after a few races, but to progress, money was the name of the game and to earn it you had to grind.

Early races in *Gran Turismo* brought little reward, but to rise up through the ranks you needed to complete the sometimes infuriatingly difficult and long-winded licence tests. From simple accelerating and stopping tests to full-lap time trials, these challenges often had us screaming at the screen in frustration, such was their penchant for challenging even mildly imprecise driving.

Yet, while the hardcore nature of the career progression turned off some, it was hard not to play *Gran Turismo* just for its sheer beauty. The on-screen displays, such as speed and gear selection, may have seemed, even in the late-Nineties, straight out

KEY FACTS

■ With 10.85 million units shipped worldwide to date, *Gran Turismo* is the original PlayStation greatest hit. This cemented racing as one of the console's key game genres.

■ It is claimed that during the five-year development period of *Gran Turismo*, Yamauchi only went home for four days.

■ Yamauchi believed that, despite the depth and breadth of *GT*, the original game only forced the PlayStation to work at 75 per cent of its maximum capacity.

■ The game's soundtrack set a precedent for future sequels with a heady mix of Japanese lounge music and contemporary pop songs.

of an arcade booth, but the cars were pixel perfect at the time. The polygon count of the original may be orders-of-magnitude less than the current offerings, but at the time this was a game with stunning clarity.

■■■ Yamauchi and his five-strong team ensured that each car was true to its real-life counterpart. The handling physics were groundbreaking, setting a new benchmark for a whole generation of games. Each vehicle possessed a weight and momentum that other titles had, until that point, failed to match. The effect was the first console game to truly deserve the genre of a driving simulator.

The 11 markedly different circuits all required finesse and real skill to navigate quickly; you couldn't just pick up *Gran Turismo* and drive like a world champion, and it took time to learn your craft. Yes, handling could be fine-tuned in a myriad of ways, but ultimately this was a game about perfecting your driving style.

Perhaps, it was this that led the AI to be slightly disappointing. Each computer-controlled rival was tricky enough to prove a challenge – although difficulty was non-adjustable – but each grid was composed of just five fellow virtual racers. Along with this, the sound of each car could have done with some extra development time, proving that while it was the best of the bunch, *Gran Turismo* still had room for improvement in the coming generations.

Despite this, it's challenging, expansive gameplay provided plenty of hours in front of a screen for racing enthusiasts, topped off with an excellent in-game soundtrack of contemporary pop songs. The age of true simulation was dawning and *Gran Turismo* had already marked its place on top of the podium on its the way to becoming an international phenomenon.

THE AGE OF TRUE SIMULATION WAS DAWNING AND GRAN TURISMO HAD ALREADY MARKED ITS PLACE ON TOP

GAME CHANGERS


THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

Released: 2000 Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Nintendo EAD System: N64



Majora's Mask was one of a few N64 titles that required Expansion Pak support, as its cleaner textures and detailed backgrounds required the extra 4Mb of RAM.

Succeeding one of the most critically acclaimed titles ever made, this more nuanced Zelda entry is an example of a game that was way ahead of its time

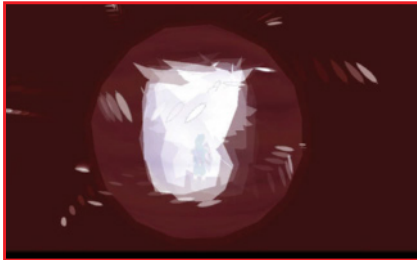
 DESPITE ITS BRILLIANCE, it almost seems anarchic to claim that *Majora's Mask* is a more forward-thinking and influential title than its older sibling, *Ocarina Of Time*. Although *Ocarina* revolutionised 3D gaming, tearing up the adventure game rulebook in the process, *Majora's Mask* was a work of experimentation and, ultimately, innovation. Through building upon the wonderful framework pioneered by the previous game, Nintendo managed to push its 64-bit console to the limit and in the process created a franchise entry with an unprecedented amount of depth.

This depth arises from multiple junctures. Although the basics of the game are the same as that of *Ocarina*, *Majora's Mask* is more a manifestation of creativity than a tour de force of mechanical design. Seen in the game are various concepts that weren't present in *Ocarina Of Time*, and so at its root it feels more like a work of heart – a risky yet confident segue into uncharted territory for the series.

Of course the exemplary gameplay and graphics inherent in *Ocarina Of Time* had been brought forward for Link's second N64 outing. The game was built in the same engine as its predecessor and utilised the same graphics package, therefore enabling the development team to turn the game around in only a year, compared to the four-year development cycle enjoyed by *Ocarina*. The same combat returned – complete with strange camera mechanics – as did a focus on dungeon crawling and elements of open-world exploration. However, this is where the comparisons to *Ocarina* end.

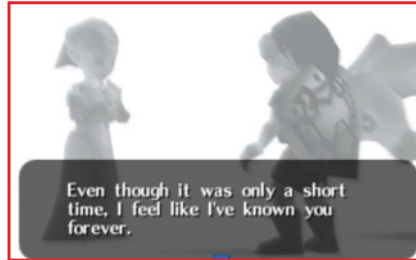
In narrative terms *Majora's Mask* strikes a more adult chord. Opening with Link riding through a misty forest to search for a friend, the game introduces the Skull Kid, sporting the game's eponymous facial attire. This mask was stolen from the Happy Mask Shop salesman, found in Hyrule market in *Ocarina Of Time*, and he hints at an ancient apocalyptic power that resides within it. Link enters Clock Town in

ADVENTURE TIME | MAJORA'S MASK PROVED ITSELF TO BE A MORE THOUGHTFUL EXAMPLE OF THE ADVENTURE GENRE WITH THESE SPECIAL ELEMENTS



FAST TRAVEL

★ Unlike in earlier *Zelda* titles, Link is able to fast travel in *Majora's Mask*, which goes some way to mitigating the effects of the real-time cycle. Although we are used to seeing far bigger game worlds nowadays, the land of Termina was pretty large for its time and trekking across it with only six in-game hours left is not exactly a formula for fun.



SENTIMENT

★ The *Zelda* series has always done a sterling job of providing moments of emotional heft. These are littered throughout *Majora's Mask* – from seeing the Skull Kid embracing two fairies and crying because he's lonely to the moment when Link experiences a flashback to talking to Princess Zelda, everything here carries a certain weight.



BOSSSES

★ The franchise has never been short of excellent boss fights, but a couple of the mayors in *Majora's Mask* really stand out. Pictured here is the boss at the end of Woodfall Temple, one of the four giants that Link has to face to prevent the moon from falling. The main event against *Majora's Mask* on the moon is one of the best in the whole franchise.

the land of Termina to find the moon will fall from the sky after three days and destroy the world.

Link sets about conquering four dungeons and the giants within in order to force them out of hiding to stop the moon from falling, enabling him to go up to the moon and face the Skull Kid and Majora's Mask once and for all. This threat carries weight where the likes of Ganondorf never could, as the moon is visibly sinking lower in the sky with every second that passes, and conversations with NPCs reveal their thoughts on the imminent apocalypse.

Masks play far more of a role in the game than they did in *Ocarina*, with a select few proving necessary to progress in the game and allowing Link to shape-shift. These few masks are simple to obtain, however the larger proportion of the 24 masks available in the game require very specific criteria to be met, often at very specific times throughout the game's three-day cycle. This feature still hasn't seen a rival outside of the RPG space to this day. That an action-adventure would display such intricacies is still impressive 14 years later, and highlights the astute nature of the game's design.

THE MOST INTERESTING CONCEPTS ARE THE GAME'S REAL-TIME ASPECT AND TIME TRAVEL MECHANICS

KEY FACTS

■ *Majora's Mask* necessitated the use of the N64's Expansion Pak, so rumours were abound at the time that it was originally a project intended for the 64DD.

■ At the beginning of the game Link is seen travelling through a forest, in search for a friend that isn't named. However, it is considered in all circles to most likely be Navi from *Ocarina Of Time*.

■ Many character designs from *Ocarina* appear in *Majora's Mask*, although not one recurring character recognises Link and no explanation is offered why they now inhabit Termina instead of Hyrule.

■■■ In typical Nintendo fashion the art direction is incredible and the series' ability to neatly theme dungeons and areas around elemental factors are no more apparent than in *Majora's Mask*. Most surprising is the depiction of the moon's surface, as when Link arrives it is revealed to be a vast, colourful field with a lone tree at its centre – further proof of the game's unwillingness to resort to the familiar.

However, the most interesting concepts at work in *Majora's Mask* are the game's real-time aspect and, in turn, its time travel mechanics as well. Due to the game's aforementioned three-day cycle, it becomes necessary for Link to use the Ocarina of Time to travel backwards and forwards as he requires. The entire three-day cycle in-game equates to around an hour in real time and is one of the earliest examples of an accomplished real-time system.

A ranch in the south-west of the game world is obstructed by a large boulder, being hacked at by a builder. Return on the third and final day and the boulder has been removed in a tangible way – it takes the builder two days to destroy it, and so the ranch and its associated side-quests are only available when his task is complete. In turn, heading back into Clock Town towards the end of the last day, the player will find it near empty, as most residents have fled in advance of the impending apocalypse.

By introducing the three-day cycle Nintendo incorporated a wonderful narrative framework and a means to cram a vast experience into a cartridge, as the predetermined environmental occurrences are allowed to repeat themselves infinitely when Link travels back to the dawn of the first day, requiring less memory. Through all of these elements *Majora's Mask* rivalled the acclaim of its predecessor and remains a challenging and curious experience.


GAME CHANGERS

MORTAL KOMBAT

Released: 8 October 1992 **Publisher:** Virgin (EU), Midway Games (US) **Developer:** Midway Games (Arcade), Acclaim Games (Consoles)
System: Arcade, Amiga, Sega MegaDrive, SNES




The original video(game) nasty, *Mortal Kombat* has had a much bigger impact on the games industry than is immediately evident - we examine how a game built in under a year shaped gaming forever

 THERE ARE FEW games franchises as notably controversial as *Mortal Kombat* – it was one of the first videogames to divide gamers and the mainstream press, its bloody depiction of one-on-one violence a step too far for some of the more conservative commentators when it was released in late 1992. Arriving first on arcade machines, the game that would go on to spawn nine proper sequels and a slew of licensed spin offs (and some *terrible* movies...) almost wasn't made at all.

In 1991, Midway tasked developers Ed Boon and John Tobias with creating a fighting game that could be put together and ready for release within a year – presumably to cash in on the hype that Capcom's *Street Fighter II* had initiated a year earlier. Ten months later, the game was ready – an initial development team of four people taking on the bulk of development. Impressive considering the whole game is crammed into 8mb of data, with a 64-colour palette and 300 animations per each of the seven characters.

On top of that, *Mortal Kombat* also introduced its unique five-button control scheme that has since become a standard in the series. A series of incredibly basic light attacks are complimented by launchers, low moves and supers – all of which use simple left, right, up or down inputs, unlike *Street Fighter's* quarter- and half-circles. This, along with the relatively shallow move pools, made it far easier for casuals to pick up than its genre rival: another reason the game quickly gained mass popularity.

 After seeing success in the arcades, *Mortal Kombat's* name began to circulate around gaming circles and, inevitably, the media – it matched even its inspirational peer, *Street Fighter II*, in terms of popularity, by 1993. Of course, the ultra-violence and over-the-top executions garnered the most attention; with international press claiming the game glorifies murder and violence. It's comic book violence, sure – something the action movies of the time easily

THE ANATOMY OF MORTAL KOMBAT

MORTAL KOMBAT HAS GONE ON TO INSPIRE A GREAT GLUT OF GAMES, BUT WHAT LEAD TO ITS CREATION IN THE FIRST PLACE?



STREET FIGHTER II

★ *Street Fighter II*, Capcom's seminal fighting game, directly caused *Mortal Kombat*'s creation. When Midway's rival launched, Capcom went as far as advertising *Street Fighter* as the superior fighting title in an attempt to stem *Mortal Kombat*'s very impressive sales rush.



JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

★ In the very early stages of the game's development, the studio had named Liu Kang 'Minamoto no Yoshitsune' – a name later dropped by Boon because he "just couldn't deal with the name". Goro, too, came from a Japanese myth – based on Rokurokubi: demons with stretchy heads.



MIDWAY'S SCHEDULE

★ The reason that *Mortal Kombat* had such a short time in development (only ten months) was because Midway only ever intended it to be a stop-gap in its other arcade plans... this then allowed Ed Boon and John Tobias free reign on the project, and, as they say, the rest is history!

outclassed – but being able to enact it *yourself* didn't sit too well with a lot of people, especially the parents of children who would wander into arcades and play the game without any kind of supervision.

The press backlash against the game's trademark 'Fatality' finishers was in full swing by the time the game was ready to move into the home console market. For publishers, this was a tantalising opportunity: all news is good news, and during the Nintendo Vs. Sega console wars of the early Nineties, Sega executives were licking their lips at the opportunity to get one over on their Nintendo rivals. Sensing the hunger for the blood and violence *Mortal Kombat* offered in the now-maturing games community, Sega cannily released the home version on the MegaDrive with the 'Arcade Edition' dub: something Nintendo's tame, bloodless, murder-less version didn't on the SNES.

The result? Sega saw their market share climb to 55% in 1993, the first time Sega had ever pulled ahead of Nintendo in the console war, with thanks to some particularly aggressive advertising on Sega's

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODY DEPICTION OF ONE-ON-ONE VIOLENCE WAS TOO MUCH FOR SOME COMMENTATORS

KEY FACTS

■ *Mortal Kombat* mainstay Jonny Cage was supposed to be a virtual version of Jean-Claude Van Damme (hence the 'JC' initials) but the actor dropped out during negotiations... leaving a parody in his place

■ The game went through the names *Kumite*, *Dragon Attack*, *Death Blow* and *Fatality!* before the developers finally settled on *Mortal Kombat* after someone mysteriously wrote a K over the C on a drawing board

■ *Mortal Kombat* veteran Raiden was based on the character Lightning in *Big Trouble In Little China*

part ("Genesis does what Nintendon't" was a genuine slogan used at the time). Sega had tapped into that anarchic, 'screw the man' rebellious nature of the Nineties with much aplomb.

■■■ Transient profits are all well and good, but the decision to release the game uncensored would return to haunt Sega and Acclaim when their game was taken to the Supreme Court under accusation of being 'a menace to America's children'. Sega executives believed the case was pushed to court by Nintendo, though no solid proof of this claim exists.

Without *Mortal Kombat* bringing the 'problem' with violent videogames to the attention of the general public, we wouldn't have the Entertainment Software Association (a body that started out as the Independent Digital Software Association). From lobbying in Washington to fighting censorship, the ESA vowed to self-regulate, setting up the ESRB ratings system – which influenced our European PEGI (Pan European Game Information) – and even lead to the creation of E3.

Since then, aside from a little in-fighting between hardware manufacturers, the games industry has been largely united in its drive to present games as equal to other media. Without *Mortal Kombat* setting a very graphic precedent in what games *could* get away with, it's likely the industry might have travelled a safer path, making smaller ripples before ever hitting a level where the American senate had to take them seriously as a form of entertainment. It's quite ironic for a game built in ten months, really, but without *Mortal Kombat*, this industry would be nowhere near as developed as it is today.

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODIEST MOMENTS

THE ORIGINAL MORTAL KOMBAT IS THE REASON OUR INDUSTRY IS BOUND BY A SELF-IMPOSED RATINGS SYSTEM... BUT THAT GAME'S VIOLENCE AND GORE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING. DON'T SCAN THIS PAGE IF YOU DON'T WANT ANY HIGH-OCTANE NIGHTMARE FUEL...



SUB-ZERO'S SPINE RIP FATALITY

■ THIS FATALITY WAS actually referenced explicitly in the court case brought against Midway and Sega in 1993. It even inspired Senator Lieberman (opposing Sega) to quote "I was startled [...] And at the end, if you really did well, you'd get to decide whether to decapitate...how to kill the other guy, how to pull his head off. There was all sorts of blood flying around."



FALLING INTO THE PIT

■ THE SECOND ITERATION of The Pit (it was the keystone stage of the first game) was much more imposing and terrifying than the first. It was the first time the *Mortal Kombat* series deviated from its side-on view, instead opting for an overhead view as your opponent plummeted to the ground, before that spine-shattering *crunch* audio effect... which we can still hear today.



KUNG LAO'S HAT SPLIT

■ WHEN DEVELOPING THE second *Mortal Kombat*, the developers wanted to include everything they planned for the first game, but didn't have time due to scheduling. As a result, new characters, fatalities and stages were introduced. The best one (and one of creator Ed Boon's favourites) was Kung Lao splitting an opponent in half with his weirdly sharp hat.



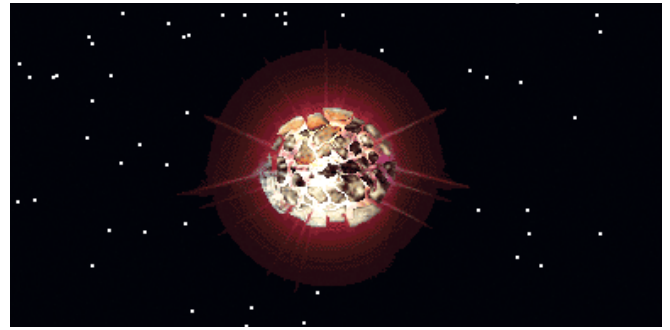
REPTILE'S ACID SPEW

■ AFTER HIS WEIRD cameo in the first game, Reptile graduated to legitimate playable character by the time *Mortal Kombat II* hit the shelves. His fatality involved spewing acid onto the opponent, melting them to the bones. Because of this, the game was banned in Germany and censored in Japan, the first time a Western game was censored in the country.



KABAL'S TERRIFYING FACE

■ KABAL MADE HIS debut in *Mortal Kombat III*. He was supposedly horribly disfigured, leading to his reliance on a respirator and a mask that protects his face. One of his first fatalities involved the removal of his mask, to reveal a face so horrifying that it *literally* scares the soul out of his opponent.



EXPLODING YOURSELF, YOUR ENEMY... AND THE EARTH

■ SMOKE HAS ALWAYS been strange, his whole existence merged with the Sub-Zero moniker and the ninja brothers that go with it. Smoke's even weirder moves culminate in him firing a bajillion grenades out of himself and causing the world to explode.



MEAT'S VERY EXISTENCE

■ ONE OF MORTAL KOMBAT 4'S hidden characters, Meat is supposed to be an experimental subject that escaped Shang Tsung's custody before whatever cruel intentions of the mad sorcerer were fulfilled. Completing all Group Mode challenges in 4 would make any character you select become Meat – so you couldn't escape him and his rotting flesh and his hanging eye.



THE REBOOT'S 'X-RAY' MOVES

■ DURING THE PR campaign for what the media would come to call *Mortal Kombat 9*, Ed Boon promised fans of the AWOL franchise that when they finally got the new game, they'd bask in its violent glory – promising it would be the most violent yet. Boon wasn't lying – fatalities aside, the 'X-Ray' moves alone could have satiated our gore-hunger.



THE LIVING FOREST STAGE DEATH

■ THE LIVING FOREST is a staple arena in the *Mortal Kombat* series now, after being introduced in the second game. But it took until the ninth instalment of the core series – which travelled to a very self-aware 'reboot' timeline – for the game to allow you to kick an opponent into the trees, getting them crushed to bits by splintery wooden teeth...



QUAN CHI'S NEW FATALITY

■ WE'VE ONLY SEEN snippets of *Mortal Kombat X*, and had a few hands-on demos with it. The new graphics make all the blood and gore look more real than ever, and the result is some tremendously cringe-inducing fatalities. The worst so far? Quan Chi summons a dagger and drags his opponent onto it with his psychic powers, spins them round and splits their body in half.



GAME CHANGERS

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

Released: 2001 Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios Developer: Bungie System: Xbox

Halo: Combat Evolved's port to PC was largely unspectacular, though being able to use banshees in the game's larger maps was a real bonus at the time.



When Halo exploded onto the scene at the start of the millennium, it established the first-person shooter as a valid console genre and introduced subtle gameplay innovations that are still emulated today

FOR THE MAJORITY of gamers, Xbox and Halo are symbiotic. If you were one of the 5 million people who picked up the original Halo at the launch of Microsoft's first console, then chances are the brand and world of Halo: Combat Evolved has, in some way, shaped how you play games. Bungie's first console offering is widely regarded as a landmark for console gaming; it was the first first-person shooter on a pad that used dual-stick mechanics to the standard that we see in games nowadays.

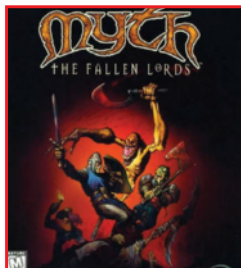
Halo ushered a whole section of the gaming community into the FPS realm – the genre was once the domain of keyboard and mice players on PCs and Macs, and the thought of dropping into the first-person perspective with a pad seemed ghastly. While TimeSplitters and GoldenEye had come before and shown that it *could* be done, Halo took the best parts of its peers and fused them together to create a game that defined console gaming for the new millennium.

Many of the standard tropes we see in modern FPS games owe their shape to the original Halo. Before the sci-fi shooter's release, FPS games would have seemingly infinite weapon slots, letting you choose and equip your loadouts on the fly. Halo dropped that mechanic in favour of a two-weapon system, where you could raid the battlefield for weapons discarded by your foes should one of your guns become depleted. Grenade usage was also altered – forgoing the conventions of its day, Halo opted to map grenades to their own button, so they were always usable and could be thrown on a twitch-instinct basis. Mix in the fact that Halo was the first game to introduce a rechargeable shield (alongside health packs that were later phased out), and you had a FPS that pretty much created its own sub-genre.

These alterations to gameplay made Halo a more tactical shooter, with an emphasis on strategy and foresight. No longer could you rush into a level all guns blazing – a desperado attempt at clearing out a

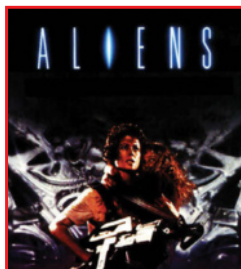
THE ANATOMY OF HALO

THE ART DIRECTION OF HALO IS SOME OF THE MOST ICONIC IN GAMING, BUT WHERE DID IT COME FROM?



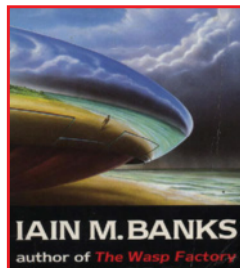
MYTH

★ The initial conception of *Halo* was to 'basically be *Myth* in a sci-fi universe', according to a blog on Bungie's site. Another Bungie game, *Myth*, classified itself as a 'real-time tactics game'. There were builds of *Halo* that adhered to this genre – where the player controlled marines in real-time 3D that had access to prototype Ghosts and Warthogs.



ALIENS

★ Aside from the obvious connections between the Flood drones and *Alien's* facehuggers, there's also an influence that ties into Sgt Johnson's character design – he and *Aliens'* Sgt Al Apone spring from the same clichéd character trope: both surly, black marines depicted exclusively with a fat cigar hanging out of their mouths.



IAIN M BANKS

★ The titular *Halo* rings that surround the world are symbolic and defining megastructures within the gameworld, and are inspired partly by Iain M Banks' sci-fi Culture series of novels, with Bungie designers citing *Consider Phlebas* and *Excession* in particular as key influences on the design of *Halo*.



MARATHON

★ *Halo* was always a spiritual successor to Bungie's breakout hit *Marathon* (and its sequel, *Marathon 2: Durandal*). Bungie even stated upon *Halo's* release that while the layman will enjoy the game, *Halo* would have the most appeal to fans of the developer. References to the *Marathon* series are still visible in the 343 Industries *Halo* games.

structure. *Halo* established itself as a more cerebral brand; a thinking gamer's FPS that forced you to plan ahead.

■■■ THE AI COMPOUNDED the game's strategic element – smarter and more dynamic than anything before it, *Halo's* AI engine ran unscripted encounters with the Covenant, a devoutly religious alien race that saw protagonist Master Chief as the antichrist and would stop at nothing to destroy him. The random nature of enemy encounters made firefights more chaotic, and gave an added element of challenge to the myriad battles you'd fight throughout the game. Since *Halo*, intelligent enemy AI has become the standard, but at the game's launch, the different behavioural patterns enacted by the Flood and the Covenant were truly ground-breaking.

The level design in *Halo* was an advert for what the Xbox could achieve. For an Xbox launch game, *Halo* managed to extract a ridiculous amount of power from the console; the levels *Halo* showcased were huge, and the game had no issue running the impressive graphics or animations. Even compared to the PC releases of the day, *Halo* was massive. It operated on a scale unseen in FPS games, with maps and levels so large that Bungie introduced vehicles to help traverse

THE LEVEL DESIGN WAS AN ADVERT FOR WHAT THE XBOX COULD ACHIEVE

KEY FACTS

■ It's estimated that *Halo* was the second highest-grossing game of the 128-bit era, achieving revenue of \$170 million, just behind *GTA: Vice City's* \$300 million.

■ The online gameplay the series is now famous for didn't ship on the original Xbox game; rather, it was added for the PC port two years later. This was because Xbox Live wasn't ready for the game's initial release.

■ Bungie was originally making *Halo* to run on Windows and Mac, but when Microsoft saw what potential it had as a studio and bought them out, *Halo* became an Xbox exclusive.

the terrain. Once again, vehicular combat was something never before seen in a FPS, and for a first-time incorporation into a game, Bungie worked wonders with the driving mechanics.

Level design was symbiotically tied with narrative in *Halo*, playing with the way gamers would explore and progress through the game. The first set of missions would have you pushing through the world you'd crash landed on – an almost alpine alien realm encircled by the eponymous Halo ring – before you were chased back through the same areas you'd already explored. This sounds trite, but the repeated textures and environments were populated by a variety of encounters, culminating in ambitious four-way battles between the player, the Covenant, the zombie hoard-style Flood and the planet's native defence systems, the Sentinels. It was this scope – this immense scale – that drove home exactly what *Halo* and the original Xbox could achieve.

Bungie didn't stop at single-player, though; *Halo* was the first console game to have an option to play 16-player LAN on its open multiplayer maps. Despite the lack of online capability (that would come in *Halo 2*), *Halo's* multiplayer mode was a huge success – popularising LAN parties for console gamers by taking advantage of the native connectivity that had been worked into Xbox consoles.

Halo was a significant release in the history of both the FPS and the Xbox, and after its phenomenally successful launch, it's clear to see why it became the flagship title for Xbox. It's a huge credit to Bungie that, 12 years on, the *Halo* name carries the same weight it did at launch. There's a lot to be said of legacy in the games industry, and it's safe to say that with *Halo*, Bungie introduced a series that will rest in the annals of gaming history forever.

GAME CHANGERS

COUNTER-STRIKE

Released: 1999 Publisher: Sierra Entertainment Developer: Minh 'Gooseman' Le, Jess Cliffe System: PC



Last year Valve released the latest iteration of *Counter-Strike*, *Global Offensive*. It was the second (and more successful) attempt at bringing the shooter to home consoles.

The Half-Life mod-turned-multiplayer-phenomenon, *Counter-Strike* wasn't just the go-to PC first-person shooter but defined the genre for a new generation

THE PROLIFERATION OF modding during the late-Nineties demonstrated a hotbed of independent creativity, the spirit of which has since transformed into the prosperous climate of 'indie' development. These inventive user-made endeavours ranged from simple gameplay adjustments to complete overhauls of assets and design, themselves often spawning into properties as big as their source DNA.

Many successful mods have gone on to reach mass recognition, but as the trend continued to grow in stature it was Valve that stormed the vanguard as one of the first developers to actively encourage and cultivate a community to tinker and innovate its original design documents. Minh 'Gooseman' Le and Jess Cliffe were just two students when they began working on *Counter-Strike*, both spending more time devoted to coding the game than on their actual studies. But it was a gamble that paid off, the duo selling the game back to Valve, working with the studio and forging its legacy as one of the most influential and enduring FPS of all time.

Released in 1999 as internet multiplayer was in a nascent state, *Counter-Strike* was the antithesis

of the excessive slaughter and unrelenting pace of *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament*. Offering a tactical alternative that placed as much emphasis on careful planning and teamwork as it did having lightning-fast reflexes (although speed was also a technical issue with dial-up pings soaring into the 100s), *Counter-Strike* required a completely different mentality to a genre on the brink of revolution.

It was in part due to the round system that reshaped how respawning worked. Rather than hurtling through maps spraying lead with little concern for your own mortality, being reckless had a penalty; death resulted in waiting several minutes for a new round to start and diminished the chances of your team's ability to fulfil its objective. *Counter-Strike* established stakes previously absent from a genre reliant on speed and did so without compromising what made the act of namelessly killing people online so thrilling in the first place.

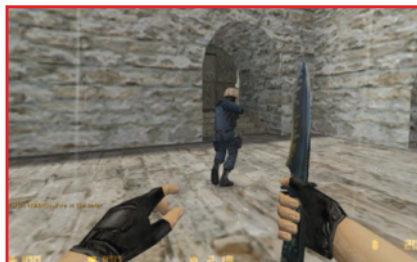
This contributed to an unprecedented approach to teamwork. It became immediately clear that communication was key to winning. It became even clearer that you couldn't trust strangers. Clans became an integral component to the dedicated

KILLER MOMENTS WHILE COUNTER-STRIKE IS PACKED FULL OF MOMENT-TO-MOMENT JOYS, A FEW SIMPLE PLEASURES WILL RESONATE WITH ANY CS VET...



KNIFE KILL

★ The knife kill is one of the trickiest manoeuvres to pull off in the tense 5v5 battleground of *Counter-Strike*. And while there's a mischievous gratification in a sly back stab, challenging an opposing player to a proper knife fight and coming out the victor is a true right of passage for any *CS* player.



GAWP AT AWP

★ The first few seconds of any *CS* match is a mad scramble toward the perfect vantage point. Map *de_dust2* offers a perfect exploit in that regard; terrorists can arm themselves with the contentious AWP sniper rifle and study the small slit between the main gangway doors for unsuspecting counter-terrorists.



THE BRIDGE

★ The design layout of *de_aztec* is one of *Counter-Strike*'s most superb creations. The highlight is undoubtedly the bridge that connects one side of map to the other. A claustrophobic walkway dangling above a vast expanse, it's a testament to the brilliant map design that elevates *Counter-Strike* above its competitors.

Counter-Strike experience; it was a proud badge of honour to brandish a clan tag and the incentive to invest more hours into training was rewarded by triumphing in community tournaments and LAN events. *Counter-Strike* became as much a competition as it did a game and there's a clear pathway to the popularity of esports, dedicated portals and the ubiquitous streaming culture that leads right back to the early days of *Counter-Strike* and the dynamic interactions of its community.

■■■ More than anything, though, *Counter-Strike* wasn't just a fan creation but fostered a community of fans that contributed as much to the game as they took out. It laid the groundwork and dared its fans to do better, the results of which were some of the most popular maps and user-created modes that dwarfed the creative achievements of the original team. It provided an accessible creative platform; somewhere for would-be developers to cut their teeth in what would become a dominant genre in subsequent years.

Counter-Strike arrived at a flashpoint in the industry, at a time when consumers were beginning

KEY FACTS

■ Creators Minh Le and Jess Cliffe were hired by Valve following the release of the mod to help create a full retail version of *Counter-Strike*, which was released a year later.

■ Because of the prolific cheating on *Counter-Strike* servers, Valve implemented VAC (Valve Anti-Cheat), which detected any player hacks and permanently banned users trying to use them.

■ *Counter-Strike* has since released several sequels to *Counter-Strike*, including the unremarkable *Condition Zero*, the recent console-focused *Global Offensive* and two adaptations aimed at Asian territories.

to look toward online as a competitive arena. With its combination of simplistic and balanced design outlook, matched with a reliance on player skill, it was the ultimate proving ground for gamers.

It's a testament to the strong foundations of the game that its original retail iteration (referred to as 1.6 due to its original and antiquated patch method) is still played so frequently today despite subsequent sequels. It doesn't have the flashy physics engine of its successor *Source*, nor does it boast the crisp visuals that would come with its most recent console counterpart, but what it does have is an accessibility that made it utterly addictive.

It's hard to imagine the first-person shooter genre being what it is today without *Counter-Strike*. It established the fundamentals of the genre and infused it with a delicate balance that has since been adopted by almost every major FPS franchise. Not only that but its community tweaked the formula further, launching alternate game modes, many of which integrated what has become prevalent across the genre in recent years: the addition of experience points in a mode that shifted the focus onto additional perks and abilities.

Whether or not this influenced *Battlefield* or *Call Of Duty* is a moot point: *Counter-Strike* was there first and, not only that, its original vision stands tall today as one of the best shooters you could possibly spend time playing. It helped redefine a genre, it established the ideal of a prosperous user-generating community and it would influence some of the biggest franchises in modern videogame history. Above all else, though, it's still a game that thousands of people play on a daily basis. Not just for nostalgia purposes, but because its principles and mechanics continue to match the contemporary standards of the genre today. There aren't many games celebrating their 15-year anniversary that can lay claim to that.

COUNTER-STRIKE REQUIRED A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MENTALITY TO A GENRE ON THE BRINK OF REVOLUTION

GAME CHANGERS

THE SIMS

Released: 31 March, 2000 Publisher: EA Developer: Maxis System: PC

EA originally only planned to sell 160,000 units of *The Sims* – it actually sold 100 times more than that: 16 million units.



Who'd have thought that a simulation based on your mundane duties in real life could be so fun? Well, EA and Maxis, it turns out. *The Sims* became one of the biggest PC games ever made...



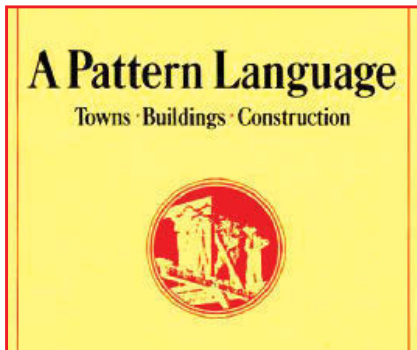
WHAT WOULD YOU do if your house burnt down – if all your possessions were taken away and you had to rebuild your life? For designer Will Wright, the answer to that question was simple: make a game out of it.

After the Oakland firestorm of 1991 destroyed all of Wright's possessions, the designer was inspired to create a virtual dollhouse to try and share his experience with the world.

A year later, Wright – who had previously worked on *SimCity*, *SimEarth* and *SimAnt* – pitched the idea of an architectural design game (then called *Home Tactics*) to Maxis, a company he co-founded, but the board of directors wasn't wholly enthused by the idea. Yet when EA bought out the studio in 1997, Wright's daydream got a second chance. EA wanted to rebrand the game to fit in with Wright's already-successful brand and work on the product could start.

THE ANATOMY OF THE SIMS

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT THE RIDICULOUSLY IN-DEPTH LITERATURE AND THEORY THAT WENT INTO MAKING THE SYSTEMS THE SIMS RUNS ON...



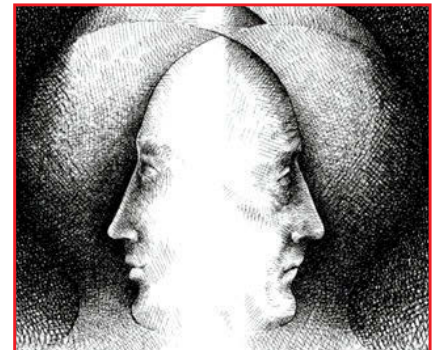
A PATTERN LANGUAGE

★ Written in 1977, this book outlines the importance of people's own designs on the spaces they inhabit: houses, communities and so on. Wright included many of the principles in *The Sims*' world-building tools.



ABRAHAM MASLOW

★ The American psychologist is famous for thinking up the 'hierarchy of needs'; a pyramid-based system that leads to self-actualisation. Wright applied this model to his Sims' morale and happiness systems.



MAPS OF THE MIND

★ Charles Hampden-Turner's *Maps Of The Mind* charts and conceptualises the mind and its processes in a flowchart-like way, and was the foundation for the artificial intelligence that powers the Sims.

From such personal and humble beginnings grew a giant – one of the first truly mainstream games of the new millennium. *The Sims* was massive – it would run on most families' home computers, it had universal appeal, and nothing quite like it had ever existed at the time. It was peculiar – when Wright first pitched the game, the Maxis board claimed 'no-one wanted to play with a virtual doll's house [...] because that was for girls, and girls don't play games'. EA had more foresight than that, though, and it's thanks to *The Sims* that a lot of younger players in the Noughties, both male and female, had their first experience with videogames.

According to EA's figures, female players make up approximately 60 per cent of *The Sims*' playerbase. While its immediate impact wasn't necessarily felt, we'd like to hope it woke up many in the industry to the fact that women were actually playing their games, as much as they may have ignored them.

■■■ The reason *The Sims* became so popular – and got so very quickly – comes down to three core design

THE GAME IS PRACTICALLY UNWINNABLE... AS SUCH, THE SIMS ENJOYS INFINITE REPLAY VALUE

KEY FACTS

■ Two years after its original release, *The Sims* had sold over 11.3 million copies worldwide, easily surpassing the best-selling PC game ever at that point, *Myst*.

■ *The Sims* licence was picked up by Hollywood in 2007, but script issues have prevented any actual progress on a cinematic adaptation of it.

■ Lead designer of *The Sims*, Will Wright, was a *Robot Wars* champion and is an active space-flight enthusiast.

■ Prior to approval, some at Maxis apparently referred to it as 'The Toilet Game'.

tenets; first, the game is practically unwinnable – there are no conditions for victory, no goal can really be achieved. As such, *The Sims* enjoys practically infinite replay value – it's a game about keeping your Sims on the right track, interfering with lite-AI elements and, basically, playing God.

Second, the game includes an advanced architecture system – thanks to its original shape as *Home Tactics* – and can be used as an educational tool. There are people on the **games™** team that actually went on to read architecture at University thanks to initial exposure to architectural theory in its simplest form in *The Sims*. The game managed to make learning fun for kids – something that you can't really put a price on.

Third, the game became a psychological phenomenon; various sects of players began to evolve from the initial playerbase. A hardcore audience grew almost instantly, forming a very strong community that's still alive and well today, while other players discovered darker sides to themselves and ended up enacting sadistic and violent acts upon their own creations.

Because of how simply the diametrically presented in-game assets looked and handled and interacted with the 3D models of *The Sims* themselves, people began to project their own lives into their avatars. At its core, whether you torture the little guys or not, *The Sims* is wish fulfilment, and it's presented in such an interactive way that we can create entire narratives – establish entire universes – within the toolbox Maxis gives us. Combined with a gentle visual experience and the soft 'Simlish' muzak that played constantly, *The Sims* was seen as a therapeutic tool as much as it was a videogame.

GAME CHANGERS


STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Released: 15 July, 2003 Publisher: LucasArts Developer: BioWare System: PC, Xbox



The original draft for the game stated that you could permanently lose squad members, but this was later removed for the sake of making the game more 'fun'

Everyone has fantasised about being a Jedi or Sith. In 2003, BioWare and LucasArts made that a reality – letting us live out our Star Wars dream

 *STAR WARS: KNIGHTS Of The Old Republic* was ground-breaking for two major reasons – firstly, the game proved what a videogame could do with the *Star Wars* property: it wasn't just some cynical licensed cash-in (something that was expected back in the early Noughties). It was also, at the time of release, a cutting edge RPG – back in 2003, taking up 4GB on a hard-drive was unheard of. But it wasn't just a necessity for BioWare to use this much memory – it was also a statement of intent.

Knights Of The Old Republic was one of the deepest RPGs ever made at the time of release. It also added depth to other genres; there were sections of the game that relied on tactical third-person shooting and even first-person shooting areas, too. BioWare took the real-time combat popularised by MMORPGs and applied the mechanics to the single-player RPG, resulting in

a unique half-turn based, half-real time hybrid that BioWare has since perfected across the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* franchises.

The idea behind this wholly new approach to combat was to channel the inherent cinematography that came with the *Star Wars* franchise and gamify it; making encounters fast and action-oriented, every encounter similar to something you'd see Lucas himself orchestrate. It helped that BioWare and LucasArts had a very fluid and understanding relationship – considering how precious LucasArts could be about its property, BioWare has gone on record as saying 'very little' of its initial content was changed. High praise indeed for a licensed game.

The game was noted for its technical achievements – BioWare chose the Xbox as the game's leading platform because of its compatibility with the PC

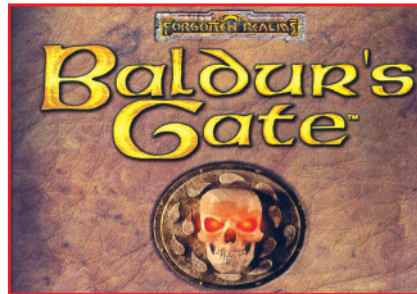
THE ANATOMY OF KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC HAS GONE ON TO INSPIRE A WEALTH OF OTHER RPGS, BUT WHAT INSPIRED THE GAME IN THE FIRST PLACE?



STAR WARS RPG

★ Wizards of the Coast's d20-based roleplaying game was a Dungeons & Dragons inspired tabletop game that required players to choose a certain class at the beginning of a story and then work together to progress in the game...seem slightly familiar?



BALDUR'S GATE

★ BioWare's previous games formed the foundations on which *Knights Of The Old Republic* would later be built – the iconic combat system actually started out as an exact carbon copy of Baldur's Gates strategically-centred mechanic before adjustments were made.



DEUS EX

★ The development team looked towards the revolutionary *Deus Ex* for inspiration to see how a game could make the player think about all the multiple paths its protagonist could take through a single level, and apply a roster's worth of skills to solve the puzzle.

(which BioWare was already well-versed in, thanks to *Neverwinter Nights*) and because the studio could achieve its vision of a huge, open world on the console. It was a vision that was well achieved; by the time the game shipped, it had grass that reacted to real-time wind, reactive dust on Tatooine and sand that remembers a player's footsteps – all of which were ground-breaking on console.

■■■ The game was also the first in the industry to weave a proper morality scale into the gameplay – the choices offered to us moved beyond the end-game 'kill or save everyone' options offered in action-RPGs before (with, perhaps, the exception of *Deus Ex*). *Knights Of The Old Republic* took that design philosophy to its logical conclusion; BioWare's seminal RPG had iterative decisions that affected the events in the story at pre-defined beats throughout the narrative, beats that were less binary than the law, chaos or neutral paths offered in Japanese alternatives on the market.

IT WAS AN RPG ANYONE COULD ENJOY – FROM WEATHERED ROLE PLAYERS TO FRESH-EYED STAR WARS FANS

KEY FACTS

■ Jennifer Hale – who voiced the female protagonist – would go on to have a very lucrative relationship with BioWare, eventually voicing the female Shepard in the *Mass Effect* trilogy.

■ Each selectable class in-game is based on a leading *Star Wars* character – Bounty Hunter (Boba Fett), Sorcerer (Darth Sidious), Jedi Knight (Luke Skywalker) and Smuggler (Han Solo) to name just a few.

■ The PC version's additional location, NPCs and weapons were ultimately added to console via Xbox Live.

But what's the point in making us choose how we want the game to play out if we don't feel like we have a stake in the world? Enter BioWare's biggest strength: character development. It helped that *Knights Of The Old Republic* had the *Star Wars* universe to provide an elaborate backdrop, but BioWare was smart – it chose to delve into an undeveloped part of Lucas' lore, some 4000 years before the events of what would become *Episode I*.

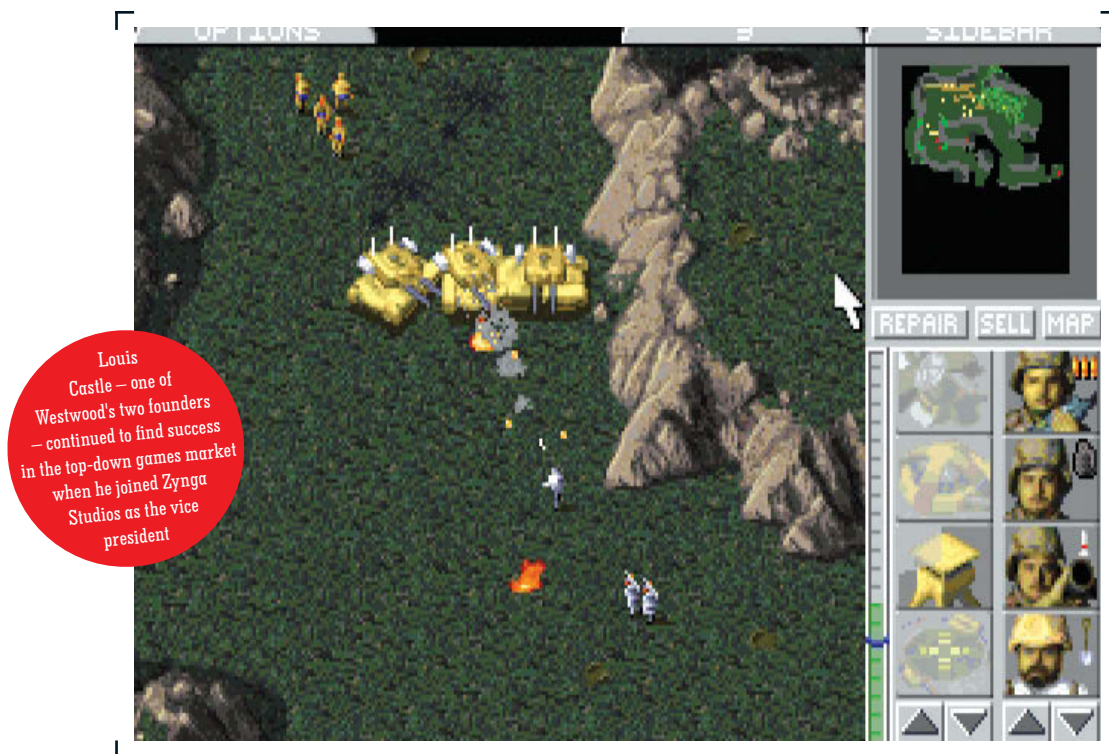
This allowed the developers to establish its own world, replete with countless opportunities to tamper with *Star Wars* lore for its own ends. This led to characters on both the Dark and Light sides that were fully fleshed out and *human*, something that RPGs had rarely managed to do before. It helped that each main character was fully voice acted, and acted *well*, too; each reaction and response to the player's actions catered and specifically directed to suit your alignment. This was a labour of love at LucasArts and BioWare – the voice recording took over a month of *solid* work, with actors recording throughout the day and night over five weeks to get enough lines to account for the game's non-linear structure.

The result of this ambitious and multi-faceted approach was a watershed moment for Western development – during the early 2000s, there was a rebellion against the stagnating RPG scene that was starting to congeal in Japan. BioWare came along and proved the RPG didn't have to be hidden behind walls of text and inaccessible menus, spikey-haired protagonists and battles with God: this was an RPG anyone could enjoy – from weathered dice-wielding role players to fresh-eyed *Star Wars* fans. BioWare changed the world – it doesn't take a Jedi to see that.

GAME CHANGERS

COMMAND & CONQUER

Released: August, 1995 Publisher: Virgin Interactive Developer: Westwood Studios System: PC, Mac, PlayStation, Sega Saturn, Nintendo 64



Louis Castle – one of Westwood's two founders – continued to find success in the top-down games market when he joined Zynga Studios as the vice president

We travel back to the birth of Westwood's award-winning, genre-cementing franchise to examine the solid foundations the studio built its success upon

COMMAND & CONQUER is a name that grabs your attention. Right off the bat, it issues you with gameplay instructions. That was always the desired effect of Westwood cofounder Brett Sperry who was 'fanatical' about naming the game after its core gameplay objectives, according to other Westwood staff.

And it was a smart idea. Back in 1995, in the United Nation's so-called 'Year of Tolerance', with Chechnya keeping the fires of war lit for another year, there were political tensions generating anxiety in western civilisations. By making the world of *Command & Conquer* feel uncannily similar, yet without attributing nationalities or races to the game's not-as-binary-as-you'd-think Global Defence Force and Brotherhood of NOD, Westwood managed to take a pop at political satire and commentary without coming across as preachy or jingoistic.

But Westwood also brought new gameplay mechanics to the RTS – moving away from the hex

map-based systems of its predecessors or the high fantasy of genre rivals at the time. Westwood took the resource management (and isometric viewpoint) it introduced in *Dune 2* and dismantled it, initially reassembling the myriad mechanics as a proto-RTS with wizards and fantasy warriors.

During the game's development – a period of three years which spanned the end of the Gulf War, continued Chechen pressures and growing anxieties around terrorism and religious extremism – the team changed tact: they began crafting a game in a parallel universe, one that artfully sidestepped the sombre imagery of a domestic war.

One way this suspension of disbelief was ushered into the gameplay was via a resource known as 'Tiberium' – a mystical and radioactive mineral that grew in clusters over the realistic landscapes *Command & Conquer* made you fight over. The machines of war on both GDI and NOD sides still felt realistic – like the tanks you'd see rolling over

THE ANATOMY OF COMMAND & CONQUER

COMMAND & CONQUER IS PRACTICALLY SYNONYMOUS WITH THE RTS GENRE, BUT WHAT INSPIRED THE GAME AND MADE IT THE GENRE-DEFINING EXPERIENCE WE KNOW TODAY? GAMES™ INVESTIGATES...



DUNE

★ Westwood's previous work in the RTS genre had set the studio up well for its campaign: by the time *Command & Conquer* was in development, Westwood already had a checklist of mechanics it wanted to fit into the game – things that would work with the *Dune* IP.



NINETIES POLITICS

★ The global threat of terrorism and the increasingly taut relationship the west shared with, practically, the rest of the world can be seen seeping into everything the story is trying to say. The grey morality of each faction is an interesting spin on the 'west is good, anyone else is bad' trope.



WESTWOOD'S OWN ACTORS

★ Aside from Joseph D. Kucan – who played Kane – there were no other professional actors: the honour of playing the various other heroes and villains fell upon the employees of Westwood themselves, who for budget reasons, usually acted their parts in spare rooms.

Afghan hills on the news – and so did the soldiers you commanded, moving away from the high-fantasy the team was used to in the *Dune* series.

This gave the game a feeling that you were playing with army men, reminiscent of the little green figures popularly sold as children's toys. It took the infantile fantasy and validated it for the older generation – and that was just one facet of what made *Command & Conquer* more addictive and ostensibly playable than its predecessors. Moving away from the grid-based system of past RTS games helped make the gameplay feel more fluid, and the resource gathering mechanic was simple enough to welcome players into the micro-management system without too much of a difficulty curve.

■■■ Players were given the option to indulge in either a sandbox free play mode or play through a campaign, which was fleshed out with live-action FMVs that recruited known actors in a camp – but oddly enjoyable – so-bad-it's-good series of

THESE FORWARD-THINKING CUTSCENES HELPED FLESH OUT THE CORE PREMISE OF THE GAME

KEY FACTS

■ The game's key resource – Tiberium – wasn't a Westwood creation and was actually inspired by a science-fiction B-movie called *Monolith Monsters*.

■ The game was more forward-thinking than even the developers realised – the original pitch for the game outlined a future where wars are "fought between western society and a kind of anarchistic terror organisation."

■ Westwood secretly coded 'dinosaur levels' into the game – when the publishers saw them, they loved the levels so much they requested the team keep them in.

cinematics. These forward-thinking cutscenes helped flesh out the core premise of the game, and give some weight to the battles you were otherwise detached from in your isometric God-like viewpoint. The pacing and layout of the campaign missions was also intentionally structured to be a little arrhythmic – creating a sense of progression that was designed specifically 'to keep players up all night'.

The LAN capabilities of the game were more refined than past RTS games, too – games could last anywhere from a few minutes to hours on end, depending on who was playing who and what their playing style was. The fact a real-time strategy game released in 1995 had a functioning four-player multiplayer mode, too, did wonders for the title's popularity. This facet protected Westwood from the one flaw the game showed through its polished veneer – the AI. Players that had spent hours upon hours complained that the AI elements were predictable, but – aside from scripted moments in the campaign – the AI was only really place-holder anyway: little could liven up the actions and the random element brought in by a human player.

At its root, *Command & Conquer* was a rock-paper-scissors game, but by fusing all the best bits of a heavily strategic, top-down epic with the consequence and urgency offered up by a real-time action game, *Command & Conquer* quickly and easily laid down the foundations for the RTS for generations to come. Even now, little remains changed about the core real time strategy genre, and that's all because of a spiritual successor to the mildly popular *Dune II* game that came out almost 20 years ago.

GAME CHANGERS

GUITAR HERO

Released: 8 November 2005 (NA) Publisher: RedOctane Developer: Harmonix System: PlayStation 2



Jimi
Hendrix's
Spanish Castle Magic
had the vocals removed
because the lawyers of his estate
blocked the possibility of an
impersonator performing
the song instead.

It wasn't that long ago that we were in the middle of a gaming peripheral and rhythm action explosion and this one game started it all. Guitar Hero bridged the hardcore and casual gap and changed the industry

UNLESS YOU WERE into DDR or arcade-based competitive games, the rhythm-action genre was all but dead in the mid-2000s. That area of gaming hadn't seen anything fresh since the late Nineties, it was fading into obscurity, and it was fading fast. In the summer of 2005, however, a small publisher called RedOctane released a game that would not only change the rhythm-action game forever, but also impact the entire world's music culture. That game was *Guitar Hero*.

Guitar Hero wasn't an accident – it was the very intentional result of Harmonix targeting a seemingly niche market. The developer was already au fait with the rhythm action genre (thanks to *Amplitude* and *Frequency*), and *Guitar Hero* was born out of the studio learning its lessons from how people responded to its past projects. Harmonix and RedOctane looked across to Japan, where the Konami-published *Guitar Freaks* had been ticking over successfully since 1998, and decided that,

between them, they could smash open a similarly shaped hole in the Western market.

Harmonix knew the abstract visuals its former games carried turned people off, and it knew the algorithms that powered the difficulties and gem tracks in the game needed to be more 'casual friendly'. This led to Harmonix scrapping the initial 'Pong-like' visuals the game carried in favour of something more aesthetically relevant.

■ ■ ■ The result was a game with universal appeal, and a difficulty curve that worked for gaming newcomers and score-attacking masochists alike. Between the gimmick of having a new way to interact with your console, and the electrical motifs, rock-inspired art direction and in-your-face anarchism the game encapsulated, *Guitar Hero* broke into the mainstream consciousness, and did so in style.

Consequently, *Guitar Hero* made the gaming peripheral cool again – the little plastic guitar that

THE ANATOMY OF GUITAR HERO

WE ALL KNOW THE HEIGHTS GUITAR HERO ROSE TO AFTER ITS LAUNCH, BUT WHAT WERE THE KEY INSPIRATIONS THAT LEAD TO ITS CREATION?



MICROSOFT

★ Microsoft's ex vice-president of games publishing, Ed Fries, told Harmonix that 'no rhythm-action game could succeed without custom hardware' when the studio pitched Frequency... feedback the developer clearly took to heart when it came to creating *Guitar Hero* and its equipment.



GUITAR FREAKS

★ *Guitar Freaks* had been around since 1998 – a popular arcade game in Japan – and its local success prompted RedOctane to approach Harmonix when the publisher learnt that the developer was trying to pitch a peripheral-based game to other companies – cue *Guitar Hero*.



GIBSON SG

★ One of the most iconic guitars ever distributed among the musical world received a refreshing breath of fresh publicity thanks to *Guitar Hero*, and the guitar is now as synonymous with Harmonix's series as it was with the new wave of British heavy metal.

shipped with the game, by all rights, should have bombed: it looked like something that would line the shelves of Toys 'R' Us, a Fisher Price-esque Gibson SG that featured colour-coded buttons instead of a fretboard, and a click bar instead of strings. It infantilised the guitar, yet captured the imaginations of gamers across the world. It turned the definition of what a 'pad' was on its head, and for a while, was the most trendy accessory to decorate any gamers' abode (fast-forward four years and a lot of gamers would have an entire faux-band setup erected precariously in their living rooms...)

■■■ The game sold over 1.5 million copies in its first year on sale, establishing the roots of a series that would later go on to gross over \$1 billion US dollars, spreading its influence over two console generations, seven standalone expansions, handheld versions and a mobile tie-in. *Guitar Hero* was reported by the likes of *Wired*, CNN, the BBC, *The Guardian* and more as 'one of the most important cultural

GUITAR HERO HAD A GREATER IMPACT ON THE MUSICAL TASTE OF POST-MILLENNIAL KIDS THAN EVEN MAINSTREAM RADIO

KEY FACTS

■ After visiting the studio two weeks before the game released, Zakk Wylde insisted the Harmonix crew put two of his songs into the game – and it did!

■ 30 of the game's songs are actually covers – performed by WaveGroup Sound with help from Drist's lead guitarist Marcus Henderson

■ Harmonix tracked the same model of fan Ozzy Osbourne used to modify his voice in *Iron Man* on Craigslist to replicate the sound of Black Sabbath's seminal hit authentically

phenomena of the 21st century'. That's because *Guitar Hero* didn't just open up the peripheral market to publishers, who jumped at the chance to extract as much profit as they could from what could cynically be perceived as gaming's newest 'fad', it also had a notable impact on the music industry.

The 47 playable tracks in the first *Guitar Hero* saw sales increase between 136% and 400% after being featured in the game. By 2007, *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* combined had earned more money than the entire digital music industry... In fact, the games had earned over £100 million more. By 2008, the music game industry accounted for 16% of all software sold in the financial year, acquiring a value of £1.9 billion.

Over half of the under-18 gaming audience in the UK had played a music action game by *Guitar Hero III*'s release (according to charity Youth Music) and it can be assumed, therefore, that *Guitar Hero* had a greater impact on the musical taste of post-millennial kids than even mainstream radio. *Guitar Hero* changed the way we bought, digested and discovered music.

It also brought social gaming to the masses – while the impact of Nintendo's Wii can't be overlooked when considering how the casual market exploded in the mid-2000s, *Guitar Hero* is also notable for how it brought co-operative and competitive gaming into the living room. There had been nothing like *Guitar Hero* before, and arguably, there hasn't been since. The game caught the imagination of the casual and hardcore gamer alike, fitting perfectly into the Venn diagram of everyone's secret desire: to become some kind of a rock god.

THE 10 MOST GIMMICKY PERIPHERALS

GUITAR HERO MADE THE PERIPHERAL VALID, BUT IT'S IN BAD COMPANY: THIS AREA IN GAMING IS A PILE OF SECRETS, WITH PUBLISHERS PUSHING PRODUCTS IN PROFITTEERING EFFORTS. HERE ARE OUR FAVOURITE EXAMPLES OF TERRIBLE PERIPHERALS...



SEGA ACTIVATOR

■ THE SEGA ACTIVATOR – aside from being ridiculously badly named – was a device that plugged into the MegaDrive and formed a ring you stood in. It then shot infrared beams upwards, supposedly tracking your flailing arms and tracking them as inputs for the game you were playing... it ultimately failed. Because it was awful.



KONAMI LASERSCOPE

■ IF YOU EVER WANTED to look like a budget Transformer while playing on the NES, you had the option of buying and equipping the Konami LaserScope – and headset that featured voice controls and a lightgun, all in one (un)fashionable piece. It wasn't very good – shouting 'fire' often never worked – and the NES Zapper did everything better.



GAMETRAK

■ THE PS2 PERIPHERAL was a motion control system that attached to your wrists with retractable cords, measuring your movements by how far the cords were pulled. It was one of the best-selling PS2 peripherals, but was unfortunately limited to only a golf game and the awful beat-'em-up, *Dark Wind*.



MATTEL POWER GLOVE

■ THE PERIPHERAL THAT'S inspired a thousand parodies, the Power Glove was an imprecise, frustrating piece of tat that was marketed at NES owners as if it were some kind of futuristic necessity. It had the potential to be so good – it even looked a *little* bit cool – but alas, it was just bad tech.



REALITY QUEST GLOVE

■ ON THE SUBJECT of gloves, it wasn't just the NES that had the pleasure of its own hand-based peripheral: the PSone was also blessed with the Reality Quest Glove. The Nineties-looking thing was more of a slipshod plaster cast than a piece of hardware. It felt plastic and cheap and the connections often broke.



BUZZ

■ BUZZ WAS LIKE setting up a budget quiz show in your own room – complete with obnoxious and over-zealous host, the game was shipped with a set of four red buzzers that were to be hit whenever you were ready to answer a question. Unfortunately, there was often lag, and three people pressing the buzzer at once would crash the game.



RESIDENT EVIL CHAINSAW

■ WHEN *RESIDENT EVIL 4* was released, Capcom thought it would be a *wonderful* idea to release a plastic chainsaw peripheral as an extension to the package... unfortunately, if you plugged in the controller and equipped it in-game, you couldn't do anything – the controller wouldn't track your movement or register any hits on enemies.



TONY HAWK: RIDE

■ IF YOU'VE EVER set foot on a real skateboard, you'll instantly recognise that Tony Hawk: Ride is a complete disservice to how skating works. The game that the heavy, cumbersome skateboard was released for was also incredibly rushed – apparently because the studio behind it spent so much time on the hardware. Oops.



SEGA BASS FISHING ROD

■ THE DREAMCAST HAD a range of forward-thinking but ultimately useless peripherals. The Sega Bass Fishing Rod was a pretty underwhelming experience when used as a virtual fishing tool, but when it was used in a cheeky game of *Soul Calibur*... that was when the odd, dwarf of a fishing rod really came into its own. Not so much for the fishing, though.



DJ HERO DECKS

■ FOLLOWING ON FROM *Guitar Hero*'s runaway success, Activision thought it would be a lucrative idea to target the other side of the music market – in the electronic and dance scene. The game was considered a flop at first – with the peripheral largely blamed – but the games *still* make Activision money, so the decks weren't a total failure.

GAME CHANGERS

DEVIL MAY CRY

Released: 23 August 2001 Publisher: Capcom Developer: In-house System: PS2

Dante's name from the original *Resident Evil* iteration, Tony, can still be seen engraved on his trademark pair of versatile pistols, Ebony and Ivory. They help him juggle enemies.



A curious mix of puzzle-solving, platforming and some of the most in-depth combat games seen back in 2001, *Devil May Cry* shot and slashed its way onto the PS2 from nowhere and changed the way action games worked forever...

WE SIMPLY WOULDN'T have the modern 3D hack-and-slash games if it weren't for *Devil May Cry*. Hideki Kamiya might be most famous nowadays for his ridiculous antics on Twitter, but back in 2001, his approach to game-making was the main reason for his notoriety. The game takes its cues from Capcom's older games – you can see that in the camera works, and in the intentionally *Resident Evil*-esque environments you fight through – but it only took a couple of seconds on the pad to realise that there was nothing else quite like *Devil May Cry* out there when it launched.

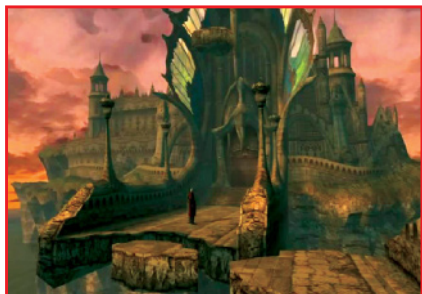
For a start, protagonist Dante was a breath of fresh air compared to the other sullen and mopey Japanese protagonists of his time. This is likely some of Kamiya's influence coming through, to be honest – the developer is known for his rebellious attitude and tendency to say *exactly* what he's thinking. Dante mimics this, with an additional cartoon veneer: the white-haired half-man, half-demon is one of the most

unapologetically mouthy characters we've seen in gaming, sometimes to the point of comedy, often to the point of aggravation.

■■■ *Devil May Cry* began its life when Shinji Mikami asked Kamiya to make a new *Resident Evil* game – something more action-orientated than previous iterations of the survival horror franchise had been. Working with *Resident Evil* veteran Noboru Suigmora, Hideki Kamiya pitched a game where Tony – an invincible and ridiculously smart soldier, enhanced with biotechnology – would fight an isolated zombie outbreak on an island off the coast of some European country. As the premise took shape, Kamiya concluded that Tony's coolness wouldn't come through if you could only see him and experience his actions from behind, and so decided to drop the pre-rendered backgrounds from the game. Kamiya opted instead for a fully 3D and dynamic camera.

THE ANATOMY OF DEVIL MAY CRY

DANTE'S INTRODUCTION IS AN ODD MASH-UP OF STYLES AND CONCEPTS WHEN YOU BEGIN TO BREAK IT ALL DOWN



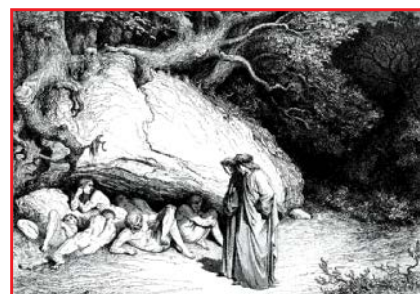
SPANISH ARCHITECTURE

★ When the team was still working on the soon-to-be-retitled *Resident Evil* game, they took inspiration from European architecture – most notably, Spanish architecture. You can see examples of this in the gothic construction of Mallet Island, which is the first setting of *Devil May Cry*.



ONIMUSHA: WARLORDS

★ It was a glitch in the original *Onimusha: Warlords* game (also developed and published by Capcom, back in early 2001) and that inspired Kamiya to experiment with giving Dante the ability to juggle his many enemies with his guns and vicious aerial attacks.



DANTE ALIGHIERI

★ Surprising no-one, the lore of the entire series is heavily inspired by *The Divine Comedy*, the seminal poetic work of Dante Alighieri. The names of most of the game's characters were lifted directly from his work, such as Virgil and Trish, and the pattern continues in the sequels.

Mikami then weighed in, deciding this new ultra-quick and cool direction just wasn't in keeping with what *Resident Evil* was all about, and decided to scrap the idea. He convinced Kamiya, his team, and Capcom to carry on the project, though, under its own title. So Kamiya renamed Tony to Dante, swapped the zombies for demons and doubled down on the combat.

That's when *Devil May Cry*'s trademark combat really began to take shape – during a test of the game, Kamiya was fascinated by how Dante could keep enemies in the air if he jumped and attacked at the right time. He decided to make this a core mechanic in the game, adding a gunplay mechanic that would keep enemies in the air once launched so you could chain combos and do it in *style*.

The whole game was wrangled to fit around Dante and his new fluid, dance-like combat. Moves were created to allow him more mobility around the battlefield – lunges, parries, flips, area-of-effect bullet blasts; he was shaped into a finely-tuned killing machine. As a result, the game morphed

IT WAS THE START OF THE DYNAMIC CAMERA THAT WOULD COME TO DEFINE THE PS2'S 3D-BASED OUTPUT

KEY FACTS

■ The PS2 version of *Devil May Cry* has sold over 2.2 million copies worldwide, making it one of Capcom's best-selling new IPs of all time.

■ The series' name comes from the shop Dante runs his demon hunting business from, which was revealed to have come from Lady saying 'even a devil may cry' because of Dante's might during the third game.

■ Dante's personality was based on the character Cobra from a manga series with the same name.

into a mission-based structure, too, with each level rewarding you for style, overall damage and speed of completion. The open-ended structure of the *Resident Evil* games was deemed unsuitable for what Kamiya wanted to achieve with *Devil May Cry* – he wanted to be a sadist, to judge the gamers that bought his game. Critics argued the game was 'too hard' on release and Kamiya basically laughed at that.

■■■ There were 3D action games before *Devil May Cry*, sure, but none of them had the focus on style and fluidity that Capcom's left-field release did. It showed what the PS2 was capable of early on in the console's life, and initiated a new trend of action gaming that relied more on skill and timing – like a rhythm action game – rather than the plodding, considered pace of the action games of the time.

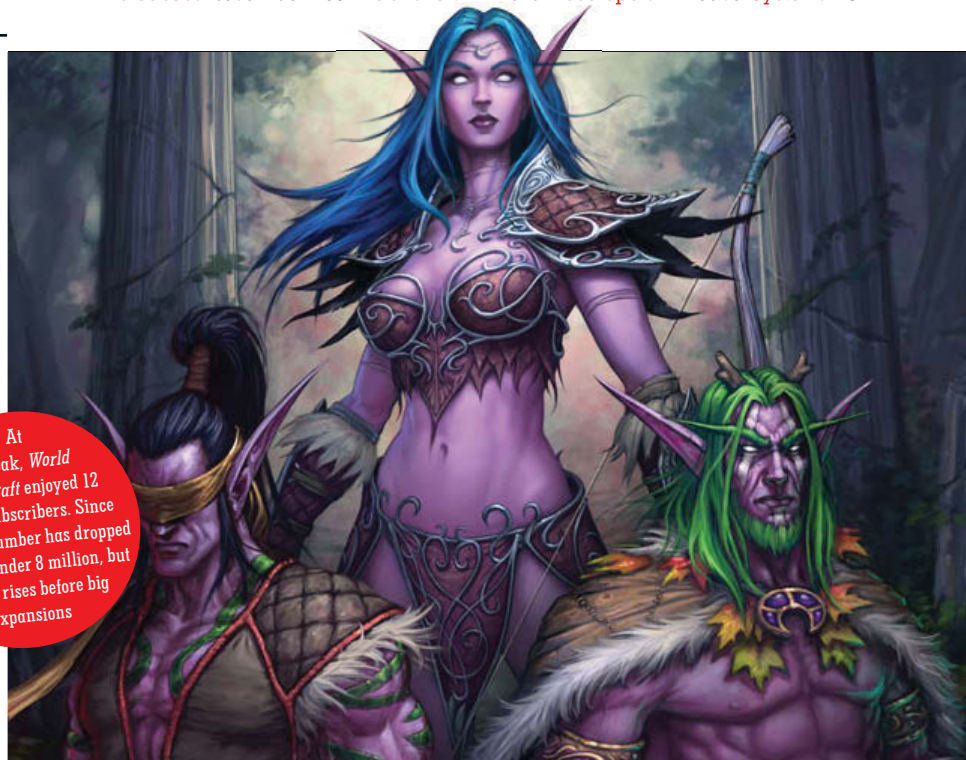
It was also the start of the dynamic camera that would come to define a lot of the PS2's 3D-based output. It might have been a fairly clunky camera system in the first game, but it was slowly improved throughout the series' life on the console and, if nothing else, worked as a fantastic proof of concept for the loose camera in a high-octane action game like that.

Without *Devil May Cry*, we wouldn't have *Bayonetta*. The *Ninja Gaiden* games wouldn't have been shaped the way they have. From Software wouldn't have made the ridiculous (but amazing) *Ninja Blade*. It's arguable that *Demon Souls* took inspiration from Capcom's action game masterpiece, too, and *Resident Evil 4* certainly wouldn't be the game that it is today without the development team cutting its teeth on *Devil May Cry* and Mallet Island.

GAME CHANGERS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Released: November 2004 Publisher: Blizzard Developer: In-house System: PC



At its peak, *World Of Warcraft* enjoyed 12 million subscribers. Since then that number has dropped to a little under 8 million, but it often rises before big expansions

WoW didn't just popularise MMOs, it infiltrated pop culture, set the standard for the genre and raised Blizzard into the powerhouse it is today

IT'S INCREDIBLE TO imagine that, ten years later, a game could still be as relevant and as important as it was when it first launched. *World Of Warcraft* launched to a great deal of praise, and though fans would argue it's not nearly the beast it was back then – and, truth be told, monthly subscriptions *have* reached what we can expect to be their peak – it's still showing would-be competition what is needed in the genre. Blizzard's MMO was a success from the word go, capitalising on its rich world built with the *Warcraft* RTS games and twisting it into a third-person RPG. The result? A fully explorable world the scale of which the industry hadn't even seen, replete with an intricate set of storylines, in-depth RPG mechanics and a reliance on gear grinding that was at once both repetitive and highly compelling.

Indeed, the reason you're spending hours praying, hoping, wishing for a legendary item to drop in *Destiny* is all thanks to *WoW*, many years before it.

But that wasn't what made *World Of Warcraft* so enthralling for its players. Simple to understand mechanics had gamers hooked early on, but it was the social aspect – a one-two punch of faction-focused war and city-based hubs – that truly kept them coming back. It wasn't particularly original for an MMO to feature faction-based PvP, but there was something about *WoW*'s system that felt incredibly eloquent. Individual raiding parties would be organised by either Alliance or the Horde, which then set about hunting down lower-level enemies of the opposing faction – a fact that will make the words 'Stranglethorn Vale' send a shiver down any veteran player's spine. There was an ecosystem to all this, however; high level players would discover the assaults, and set out to give assistance. The attacking faction would request more reinforcements and so on, until a small case of ganking had dynamically – almost *naturally* – escalated into a sortie for justice, honour or whatever belief each group had held onto.

FOUR THINGS THAT DEFINED WOW | HOW WORLD OF WARCRAFT SET THE MMO BENCHMARK



THE CLASS SYSTEM

★ *WoW* might not have created the concept of the tank, healer and DPS roles, but it streamlined the process. Some classes were built for certain roles, others acted as hybrids that allowed players to switch on the fly. Either way, it showed other MMOs how to use the Holy Trinity of MMO roles.



THE WORLD (OF WARCRAFT)

★ While both factions had footings across Azeroth, the Horde was focused in Kalimdor while the Alliance took up large portions of the Eastern Kingdoms. Getting from one place to the other wasn't easy; cherished were the players who knew the routes and transported you to another continent.



THE FACTIONS

★ Belonging to a faction wasn't unheard of in MMOs, but something about *WoW*'s combination of decades-long feuds and the sense of place in its world made fighting for your faction feel important. It also meant an unexpected sense of trepidation when encountering an enemy player in the wild.



A FOOTMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

★ The lore of *Warcraft* had spanned three RTS games, so there was plenty for players to enjoy in the transition to MMO. Whether it was hearing an Alliance worker claim 'Job's done!', Northshire or the way game structures were designed on *Warcraft III* models, it encouraged nostalgia.

World Of Warcraft taught MMOs of its day that there needed to be a greater sense of purpose to your decisions, including the faction you play as. PvP is a given, but player-driven raids on opposing cities – even in spite of the high-level NPCs that guarded the streets – is not something that can emerge casually, there has to be a reason. It was enough that the races of the Alliance and their equivalent in the Horde had a history of hatred, a history that was told, shared and expanded throughout every inch of vanilla *WoW*'s questline. Though *World Of Warcraft*'s ultimate story touched on that of the undead plague – an obvious crossover with that franchise's previous outing, *Warcraft III* – quest lines would pointedly remark on the despicable nature of their eternal enemies. And even outside of player interactions, many of these quests sent you to overcome NPC forces in an area to ensure you remember who you hated the most.

■■■ It's hard to overlook the addiction that so many suffered with *WoW*. At its height players would spend complete days, totally drawn into the world. So vast

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KEY FACTS

■ Despite being known for its huge, detailed world – the various lands of Azeroth actually encompass only 80 square miles of land. Still, exploring all that on foot took a very long while, which made the fact that mounts were so expensive a genuinely hard-earned reward.

■ *World Of Warcraft* launched with nine classes: Warrior, Rogue, Hunter, Priest, Paladin, Druid, Shaman, Mage and Warlock. What was interesting was – prior to *The Burning Crusade* – the Shaman class was restricted to the Horde faction and Paladins could only be created in the Alliance.

it was that each new area felt like a revelation, a genuine new discovery to overturn and dominate. There were no loading screens – outside of the initial one, anyway – and so it was a seamless experience, a journey even. Long before the game implemented level 20 mounts and level 60 equivalents that could take to the air, exploration was restricted almost entirely to the slow plodding of putting one foot in front of the other. But with so much to see, so much to explore, it made *WoW*'s realm of Azeroth all the more rewarding to see unfold.

But best of all, it didn't require a behemoth of a PC to see it all. By making the smart decision to utilise a cartoon-like art style, Blizzard kept the system requirements down – making it all the more accessible to an even larger group of players. This ideology stems through all of Blizzard's modern output – most recently *Hearthstone*'s success in bringing the otherwise niche genre of collectible card game to the masses – but it was an element that was absolutely core to making *World Of Warcraft* the household name it is today. Though it might not seem it to look at it, *WoW* simplified combat and input to a point that it wasn't overbearing to any level of gamer. The pace at which new abilities were introduced meant that it was easy to follow – and in the early days the necessary visit to your nearest capital to learn a skill gave each new unlock a certain degree of significance. There was nothing that was difficult to follow, and since there was always a goal to aim for – a new level, a new dungeon, a new quest, a new weapon – it tapped into that inert need that all gamers have: to unlock things. Even now *World Of Warcraft* is simpler and easier to get into than ever, a factor that likely makes it one of the most popular MMOs still to this day.